SEQUART ORGANIZATION

A LONG TIME AGO

EXPLORING THE STAR WARS CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

FOREWORD BY SCOTT CHERNOFF

EDITED BY RICH HANDLEY AND JOSEPH F. BERENATO

A Long Time Ago:
Exploring the Star Wars Cinematic Universe

EDITED BY

Rich Handley

Joseph F. Berenato

Sequart Organization (Edwardsville, Illinois)

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I Have a *Good* Feeling About This: An Introduction

by Rich Handley

It all started with a birthday, a winter holiday, a calendar, and a Wookiee.

In July 1978, I turned 10 years old, and my parents, as they always did, threw a party for me. I no longer recall where this shindig took place, but it was likely at our house, a pizza place, or a bowling alley. I remember nothing about the party, though the guests were probably my classmates, including the adorable Stephanie O'Leary, for whom my secret, all-consuming crush throughout elementary school was a secret to exactly no one in my family. But I do recall one particular gift: an action figure of what looked like a neckless, brown Bigfoot wearing a pocket book and toting a gun almost as long as his leg. His name was Chewbacca.

And I had only a vague idea of who he was.

An ill-conceived Christmas gift in 1978 helped cement the beginning of a lifelong love affair with all things Star Wars.

I somehow hadn't gotten around to seeing *Star Wars* when it had hit theaters the previous year, despite my prepubescent passion for science fiction. If *Star Trek*, *The Twilight Zone*, *The Outer Limits*, or a Godzilla film was on TV, I immediately staked my claim on control of the dial (much to the frustration of my sister, who usually wanted to watch *Good Times*). So why I didn't beg my parents to let me go see *Star Wars* is beyond me, but for some reason, it was off my radar. Still, I recall being very excited about the Chewie figure, which is a good indicator that Stephanie probably gave it to me.

Fast-forward to Christmas of that year. My friend Chris (whom I haven't seen since middle school... maybe he married Stephanie and is now raising the kids I always knew she and I would have once I figured out how to kiss a girl) bought me a gift. It was the 1978 *Star Wars* calendar[1], and its cover featured two spaceships shooting at each other near a smooth planet with a big circle on it and a line at its equator. One ship looked like

an eyeball stuck between the paneled doors of my dad's station wagon, the other a pterodactyl with wings coming out of its head. Three 20-somethings were on the cover, one of whom was apparently wearing headphones that matched her hair, or possibly a pair of cinnamon buns. "May the Force be with you... all through the year," it announced. And I had no idea what the heck *that* was supposed to mean.

But as I leafed through the pages of this 13-inch-wide calendar, I was intrigued. This looked cool – and, hey, there was Chewbacca! Suddenly, I *had* to see this movie.

Of course, it was 1978, which meant that home-viewing options were basically limited to fighting with your sister over whether you got to watch *Star Trek* or *Good Times*, but somehow, I got around to seeing it. It could have been on television (I no longer recall); in any case, it was definitely before *The Empire Strikes Back* hit theaters in 1980, as I followed that film just fine.

If *Star Wars* commercials had failed to entice me to go to the theater in 1977, the Imperials' phenomenal striking-back did the exact opposite in 1980, instilling in me a lifelong love of the saga. Within months, my saved-up allowance was emptied out, Chewie was joined by most of the other figures released for the first two movies, posters of *Star Wars* and *Empire* lined my walls, and copies of the first two film novelizations sat on a shelf alongside Alan Dean Foster's *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*, Brian Daley's Han Solo novels (co-starring Chewbacca!), and every other *Star Wars* book I could get my hands on.

In 1983, *Return of the Jedi* hit theaters, and my 15-year-old mind was blown... by how frustratingly uneven the movie was. Everything involving Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, and the Emperor was worth the price of admission, the Jabba the Hutt scenes were great fun, and the speeder-bike chase sequence doubled my heart rate. But what was with all the teddy bears? Why was Boba Fett killed off so quickly? How the hell could Luke and Leia be brother and sister if she was licking his tonsils in *Empire*? And what was with all the teddy bears? (Paraphrasing *Red Dwarf*'s Kryten, I realize that technically speaking, that's the same flaw as the first, but I thought that it was such a big one that it was worth mentioning twice.)

No matter, though. I loved the movie anyway and saw it again the following week, then delighted, months later, in reading L. Neil Smith's

Lando Calrissian novels (no Chewie this time, but Vuffi Raa was a likable surrogate). *Star Wars* fever had a strong hold on me, and not even those (admittedly adorable) teddy bears could cure my condition.

Of course, that didn't stop me from promptly selling all of those action figures so I could buy my very own Atari 2600 video-game console with a free *Pac-Man* cartridge. (Don't judge me. I was a teenager, which means I was fickle. I was also kind of late to the game with the Atari craze, which is why I ended up with *Pac-Man*, and not *Combat*, which previously came with the set.)

In the late '80s and early '90s, my *Star Wars* love waned, as it did for many fans once it became clear that no further films would be coming our way aside from two movies starring those same teddy bears, as well as animated series about the droids and... wait, really? The teddy bears again? (In hindsight, I've developed a great fondness for both the telefilms and the cartoons.)

After graduating from college, I did it again… I gave away all my *Star Wars* posters and books to two friends (I still kick myself about that one), and focused my collecting energies on *Star Trek* comic books. I remained a *Star Wars* fan, but my first love (aside from Stephanie O'Leary, of course) had always been *Star Trek* and its spinoff comics, and I still had a couple dozen issues of the 1960s Gold Key series to track down.

But then, around 1993, something both amazing and depressing happened: I filled the last remaining Gold Key gap by finding issue #1. My *Star Trek* comic book collection was complete. After a decade of searching back-issue bins in musty comic book shops, I now had every issue up to that point.

Crap. What was I going to do *now*?

See, what I had failed to take into account, while tracking down those final *Trek* issues, was that the biggest thrill of the hunt wasn't necessarily the moment of capture, but rather the hunt itself. I *liked* searching those back-issue bins, breathing in the stale mustiness of decades-old comics, and wondering, in the pre-internet world of collecting, whether I'd turn up a treasure or two among a sea of other books in which I had no interest whatsoever. But now, that era of my life was done.

That's when I noticed a set of Tom Veitch's *Dark Empire* comics, minus issue #5, sitting on a tiny, mostly empty comic shelf at a local video-rental

store. *Star Wars* comics, huh? Could that be a suitable replacement? Maybe. I recalled having seen many issues of Marvel's old *Star Wars* comics from the 1970s and '80s, but it seemed like half of them had rabbits on the covers for some reason. If I didn't like teddy bears in my *Star Wars*, then it was a safe bet that bunnies wouldn't thrill me either.

But, I figured, what the hell. I plunked down some hard-earned cash, purchased *Dark Empire*, and went home to read it. Within one issue, I was hooked. By issue #4, I was back in the car, on my way to a comic shop, as I *had* to find issue #5 before I could read the conclusion in #6. (There's a certain protocol to these things, after all.) Thankfully, that store had the issue in question – and it also had something else: Timothy Zahn's *Heir to the Empire*. There were new *Star Wars* novels, too? Sold.

By the time I'd finished reading *Dark Empire* and *Heir to the Empire*, the trumpets were sounding, the horses were champing at the bit, and the hounds were barking their excitement. The hunt was on anew, and I began my search to find every issue of the Marvel run, as well as any other novels I'd missed. And you know what? I absolutely loved all of it, especially Marvel's tales. Even the rabbits, who were actually damned fun... and, yes, the teddy bears, too.

That decision to reunite with the Force had a huge impact on my life, though I could not have known it at the time. While perusing the letters pages of Dark Horse Comics's early tales, I saw a few letters that piqued my interest, from fellow fan Brendon Wahlberg[2]. I began corresponding with Brendon, and we're still in contact two decades later. I also got to know Mike Beidler through America Online's *Star Wars* forum, while both of us were hunting down Marvel's *Pizzazz* strips. Fast-forward 20 years, and Mike has written essays for the next two volumes, *A Galaxy Far, Far Away: Exploring Star Wars Comics* and *A More Civilized Age: Exploring the Star Wars Expanded Universe*.

Thanks to Brendon and Mike, I got to know other people in the burgeoning online fan community, including Charlene Newcomb, a popular writer for West End Games's *Star Wars Adventure Journal*, whose Alex Winger tales were a personal favorite. I suggested an idea for a follow-up to Char's non-Alex tale "A Certain Point of View," and was ecstatic when she invited me to co-write it.

That sequel, “Crimson Bounty,” appeared in *Adventure Journal* #14, which led to Dan Wallace and Steve Sansweet graciously helping me land more gigs (despite my having had as many writing credits at that time as Jar Jar Binks has Mensa Awards). I've since contributed to numerous *Star Wars* magazines, Dark Horse’s *Star Wars Tales*, and StarWars.com, and am privileged to have collaborated with my pals Joe Bongiorno and Abel G. Peña on several articles, as well as helping the late Ann Crispin plot the third novel of her amazing *Han Solo Trilogy*. And all of that has culminated in the book you now hold.

A Long Time Ago: Exploring the Star Wars Cinematic Universe examines the entire *Star Wars* saga on the large and small screens. From theatrical films to TV movies, from cartoons to amusement-park rides, the mythos continues to keep audiences glued to their seats. Not even teddy bears, rabbits, or Jar Jar have dimmed the enthusiasm. This anthology features insightful, analytical essays about the franchise’s long history, written by film historians, novelists, bloggers, and subject-matter experts, that explore why the films proved so popular, where the movies and TV shows have succeeded and faltered, and why we keep going back a long time ago to that galaxy far, far away.

I still love *Star Wars*, even if the fun but flawed prequels failed to thrill me as fully as the original trilogy, and even if *The Clone Wars* was as frustratingly uneven as *Return of the Jedi*. I pop in the films from time to time, enabling me to recapture my starry-eyed youth, when I belatedly geeked out over a science-fantasy space opera about a farm boy, a princess, a wizard, a cyborg, two smugglers, and a pair of robots. How could I not? It was *The Wizard of Oz* meets *The Odyssey* meets *Lord of the Rings*, but in space![3]

As I write this, *Episode VII: The Force Awakens* is slated to hit theaters this Christmas[4], 37 years after a birthday gift set me on a lifelong path to editing this anthology. I have no idea where Stephanie is these days, but if (as I suspect) she’s the one who gave me that Chewbacca figure, then I owe her a debt of gratitude. And a debt is something that Wookiees take *very* seriously.

Incidentally, I did manage to rebuild my *Star Wars* action figure collection, thanks to a friend giving me his complete set of the classic Kenner run around the time of *The Phantom Menace*. In keeping with my

obsessive collecting mentality, I set out to procure all of the modern figures as well, and ended up with more than a thousand (every single figure from 1977 to 2005), at which point I... er... sold them all yet again because I hated dusting them.

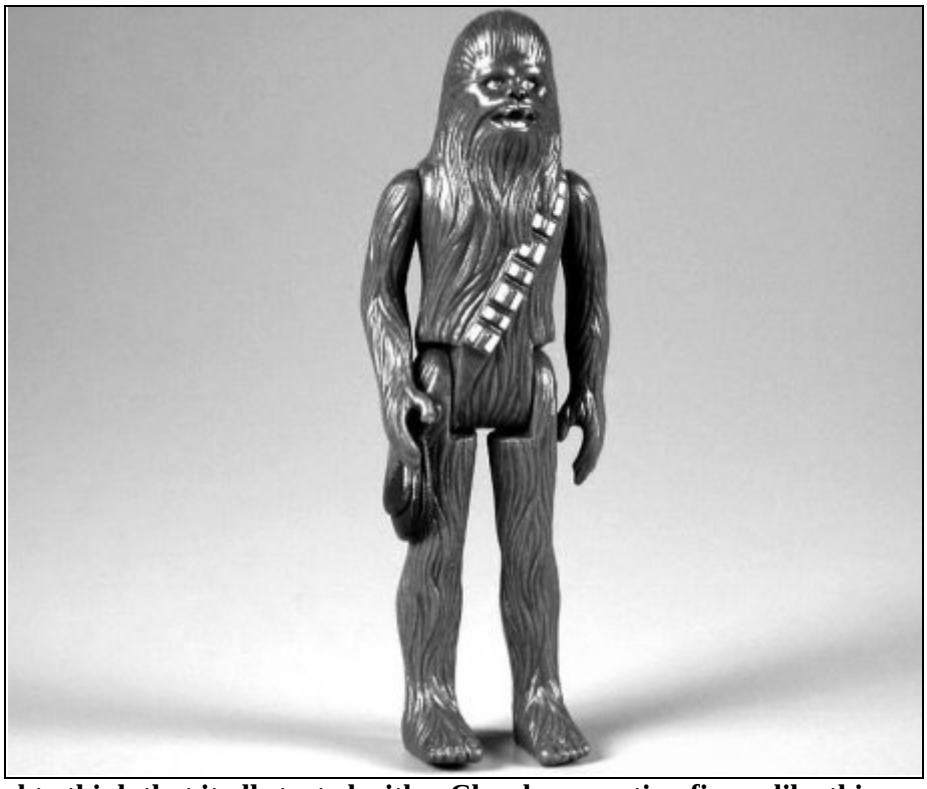
What *is* it with me and offloading *Star Wars* collections? It's like a sickness.

This time, I used the money to buy all 30 seasons of *Star Trek* on DVD, as well as put a new bathroom in my house (I've gotten far more use out of both than I ever did with the figures). How my wife hasn't left me by this point, I'll never know. I guess the Force is with me. Eat your heart out, Stephanie.

I'd like to offer my profound thanks to authors Jean-François Boivin, Joe Bongiorno, Nathan P. Butler, Ian Dawe, Julian Darius, Keith DeCandido, Kevin Dilmore, Zaki Hasan, Rocko Jerome, Alex Newborn, David Pipgras, Matthew Sunrich, Lou Tambone, Dayton Ward, and Steven H. Wilson for helping to make this anthology a valuable resource for *Star Wars* fans old and new. The opinions expressed in their essays might not necessarily mirror my own, but I have immensely enjoyed reading them, both as an editor and as a fellow fan.

I'm especially grateful to former *Star Wars Insider* magazine editor (and Conan O'Brien comedy writer) Scott Chernoff for providing this book's foreword; artists Kevin Colden and Miss Lasko-Gross, who created the whimsical covers for all three volumes; and the *Star Wars* Fanboy Alliance, who have been invaluable in their research assistance. My thanks also go out to my co-editor, Joe Berenato, and to our pals at Sequart Organization, Julian Darius and Mike Phillips, for inviting us to be the showrunners on these and several other essay anthologies published under their banner (stay tuned!).

Thanks, of course, to George Lucas, who gave us an entire galaxy. I've spent countless hours in the house that George built, and though I may sometimes criticize the wallpaper, I've still loved each and every room. And finally, I am grateful to my beautiful wife Jill just for being my beautiful wife Jill.



And to think that it all started with a Chewbacca action figure like this one…

The Power Showed Us the Light: An Introduction

by Joseph F. Berenato

I love Ewoks.

There. I said it. I love them. Absolutely, completely, unconditionally love them. I think they're just the bee's knees. I really do. They're adorable, and I want to hang out with them and hug them.

(Nevermind that they'd probably try to eat me.)

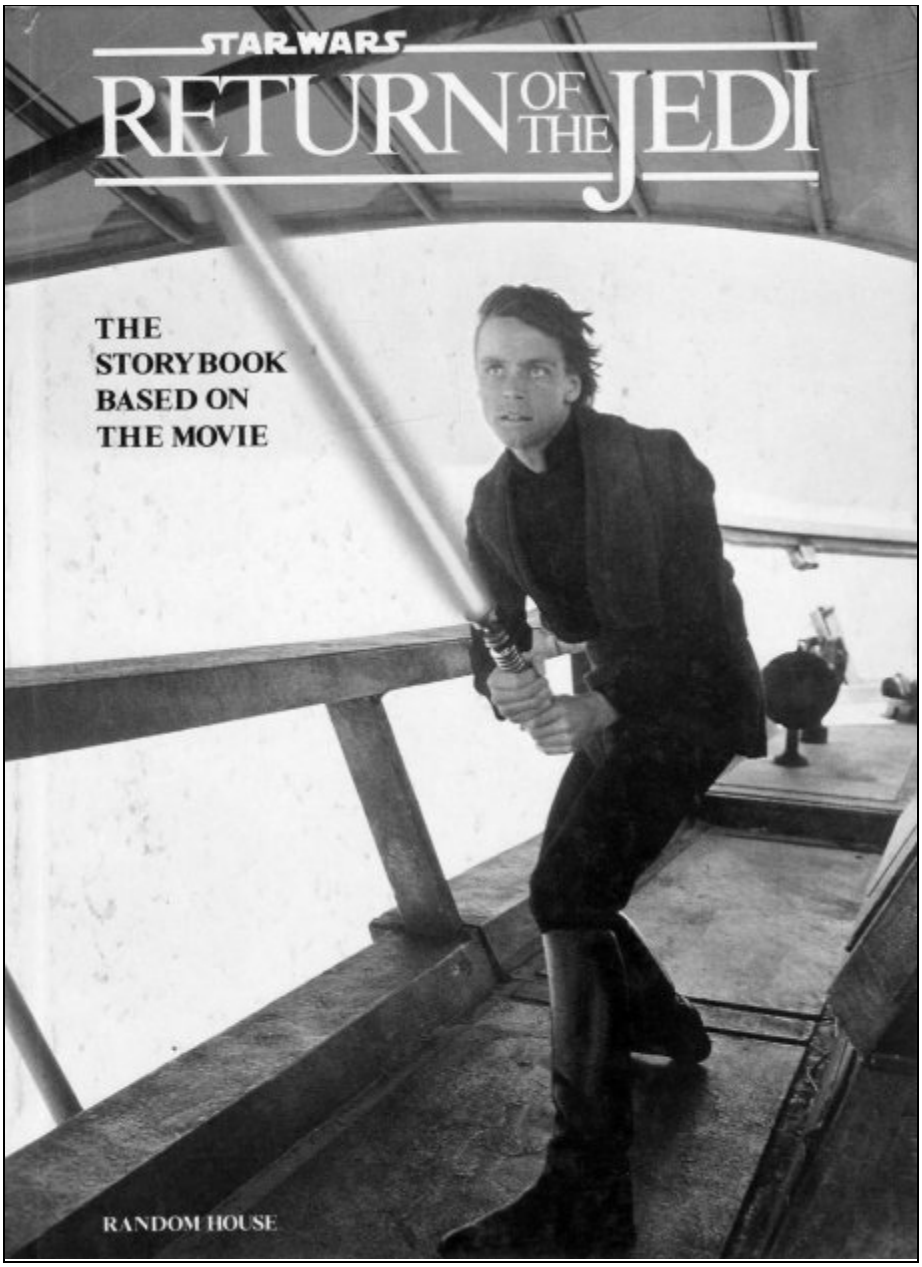
Because as far back as I can remember, the Ewoks went hand-in-hand with my introduction to the *Star Wars* universe. Logically, I must have seen a *Star Wars* film before – I can vaguely recall, at the age of four, playing with red and blue flashlights that my sister Annie got from a trip to Ringling Brothers and pretending they were lightsabers – but my earliest memories start around the time that *Return of the Jedi* was being released.

It was 1983 and I was not quite five years old – just the right age to be lured in by George Lucas's siren song. My mother and I were in the local A&P supermarket, and there, at the checkout, was Luke Skywalker.

Okay, not really. But it was a book with Luke on the cover – *Return of the Jedi: The Storybook Based on the Movie*. There he was, looking totally badass and Jedi-like, holding a green lightsaber. What? *Green*? No way! (Green, you must understand, was, at the time, my favorite color.) My fragile, eggshell mind was blown. Lightsabers only came in red and blue – *everybody* knew that.

I had to know more. I had to know the whole story. I had to have that book!

Naturally, my mother said no.



This image, viewed from the checkout line of an A&P supermarket, was enough to set into motion a lifelong interest in all things *Star Wars*.

To this day, I have no idea why; my mother regularly encouraged my love of reading, getting me hooked on books about monster movies when I was three. Her denying me that book was wildly uncharacteristic – though, now that I think about it, Mom was a major Trekkie; maybe it was some sort of territorial, Jets/Sharks pride thing that prevented her from buying it. I'll never know.

It was to be some time before I actually got to see *Jedi* and find out what the deal was with the green lightsaber. In the meantime, *The Ewok Adventure* aired on ABC, and I was instantly in love. Those giant talking teddy bears were awesome. (The giant spider, not so much; just thinking about it now, more than three decades later, gives me the willies.) They helped human children – with whom, because of their age, I could instantly relate – reunite with their family, and I very much wanted to have an adventure with them (without the giant spider, natch). Of course, the made-for-TV movie *did* raise some questions once I finally saw *Jedi* – namely, why was it that Wicket could learn to say "stah croosah!" in *The Ewok Adventure* but needed C-3PO to act as an interpreter in *ROTJ*? I didn't care. The movie was awesome. Ewoks were awesome.

Time – and the '80s – went on. My interests progressed to other things: *Masters of the Universe*, *Transformers*, *Super Friends*, and finally *Star Trek*. I watched the *Star Wars* flicks whenever they came on television – still do, actually – but I wasn't as wild and crazy about them as when I first saw the storybook at A&P. Thanks to Lucas's marketing genius, though, the trilogy was never far from my mind. I had a Darth Vader action figure (and how I wish I still had that thing) that used to get into all kinds of wacky shenanigans with my same-scaled Lone Ranger, Mego Pocket Heroes Superman, Spider-Man, Batman and Robin (until the latter's arms broke off), and Remco Universal Monsters – and when Vader and Dracula teamed up, things got really sinister, really fast.

And while I had all the good action figures, my friend Jay Celona had the good role-playing toys. He not only had lightsabers (the real ones, not the crappy "lazer sword" knockoffs), he also had both the laser pistol *and* the electronic laser rifle. With these in hand – along with his Eye of Thundera[5] and my Power Sword[6] and Blazing Sword[7] – we were ready for any enemy encroachment.

I grew older. Though my excitement for the trilogy waned, it was never too far in the background. Much of my fervor diminished, but *Star Wars* still managed to find its way into regular high school conversations. Pete Silipino and I, during band rehearsal breaks, would discuss whether – given mastery over the Force – we would become noble Jedi or be seduced by the power of the dark side (which, we figured, would probably be a lot more fun). The two of us would often take part in a "Yub Nub" sing-a-long led by

Becky Paullin, who – like me – was filled with affection for those lovable Ewoks (and who, like me, thinks that Lucas needs to put "Yub Nub" back in its rightful place at the end of *Jedi*).

Fast-forward[8] to early 1997. George Lucas re-mastered the three classic *Star Wars* films, adding in footage (Jabba in the first one? What?) and changing some things here and there (who shot who when now?), which caused consternation amongst many fans. While I have since come to form my own opinions on his seemingly incessant tinkering, at the time I was so stoked about seeing the flicks on the big screen that I didn't care about any of the changes. Later that year – one day before my 19th birthday, actually – filming began on *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, a film I made sure to see on its opening day two years later.[9]

The prequel trilogy continued with varying quality – Hey, look, they're hanging out in a diner! That's cool, right? Oh, but wait. Why does that robot have tuberculosis? Oh, that's cool, look at Yoda go! But wait. Did Jules Windu really go out like *that*?! – but I was there for each one, on opening day. I learned to love *The Clone Wars* thanks largely to the influence of my son Justin, who also regularly handed my ass to me in *Star Wars: Battlefront*. My friend George Hayes and I discussed the pros and cons of the *Darth Bane* trilogy and other facets of the Expanded Universe. And I waited for more.

We all waited for more.

Now here we are, 16 years later, eagerly awaiting the release of *Episode VII: The Force Awakens*. Threepio and Artoo have returned, of course, but this time they're not alone. Luke Skywalker is back. Leia Organa is back. Han Solo and Chewbacca are back. The band is back together, and the simple act of watching the trailer was enough to make me feel like a kid again. Mark Hamill's voice-over gave me chills – literally; I shivered and got goosebumps – and I may or may not have squealed with delight at the final scene in the *Millennium Falcon*. Like them, I feel like I'm home.

But why? What is it about *Star Wars* that resonates with so many people? Why *does* the forthcoming film feel like a homecoming?

For me, it's because, to a degree, I *am* Luke Skywalker.

No, I'm not schooled in the ways of the Force. My father never slaughtered a whole school full of children. I've never French-kissed my

sister.

But I *did* grow up on a farm. I always felt like I was destined for more, but it was hard to see precisely *what* from the confines of our blueberry packing house. I never had the opportunity to go to Tosche Station for a power converter, but I *did* often have to stay behind and work in the fields while my friends went to Ocean City or other Jersey shore towns. And while Luke only visited the Mos Eisley cantina – that wretched hive of scum and villainy – I worked for a time in Atlantic City and live a stone's throw from Camden[10], and Mos Eisley ain't got nothing on them.

When moisture farming was no longer in Luke's future, he went off, joined the Rebellion, and saved a galaxy. With blueberry farming no longer in my future, I've gone off, completed grad school, and started to teach – at the equivalent of an Imperial detention center, no less. Not an exact parallel, to be sure, but there are enough similarities to make me really relate with the character.

And perhaps that's the wider appeal of *Star Wars*: we can all, to some degree, relate to all of the characters, whether it's the wide-eyed farmboy, the fearless princess warrior, the noble scoundrel, the loyal sidekick, the whining nebbish, or the mostly silent one who does all of the work. They speak to the best and worst in each of us. We know them and we love them.

And for me, it really started with the Ewoks.

Yes, I'd seen *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back* before, but from the minute I saw the Ewoks help little Mace and Cindel Towani on the Forest Moon of Endor, I was hooked. And it may very well be the nostalgia talking, but *Return of the Jedi* remains my favorite of the original trilogy. (I freely admit that *Empire* is far superior cinematically, but *Jedi* was *my* introduction into that galaxy far, far away and so it holds my heart the most. [11])

And now I get to write about them all. The kindly folks at Sequart Organization – namely, Mike Phillips and Julian Darius – have once again allowed me to play in their literary playground. During my first book with them, *New Life and New Civilizations: Exploring Star Trek Comics*, I had the privilege of working with Rich Handley, who introduced me to many of that book's contributors (several of whom have also written for *this* book). That led to our partnership on our recent volume, *The Sacred Scrolls: Comics on the Planet of the Apes* (and its forthcoming sequel, *Bright Eyes*,

Ape City: Examining the Planet of the Apes Mythos), which paved the way for the book you now hold in your hands.

This is, of course, the first volume of a three-volume set. The other two – *A Galaxy Far, Far Away: Exploring Star Wars Comics* and *A More Civilized Age: Exploring the Star Wars Expanded Universe* – are in post-production as of this writing, and aren't too far behind it. Our goal with these three books was to attempt to examine as much of the *Star Wars* universe as possible. We realize, of course, that with close to 40 years – and millions of pages – of history, we can't possibly cover everything, but these books are our attempts to try[12].

I would very much like to thank those who have aided us in the first part of this journey: the aforementioned Mike and Julian, who committed to these three volumes without a moment's hesitation; essayists Jean-François Boivin, Joe Bongiorno, Nathan P. Butler, Ian Dawe, Julian Darius, Keith DeCandido, Kevin Dilmore, Zaki Hasan, Rocko Jerome, Alex Newborn, David Pipgras, Matthew Sunrich, Lou Tambone, Dayton Ward, and Steve Wilson, who have turned in extraordinarily insightful works of criticism (even if they may or may not have harsh words to say about my beloved Ewoks); former *Star Wars Insider* magazine editor and Conan O'Brien comedy writer Scott Chernoff, for providing this book's foreword; artists Kevin Colden and Miss Lasko-Gross, who took our rough ideas for the covers for the three volumes and turned them into something absolutely special; and, of course, my co-editor Rich Handley. It's a privilege to work with you, m'man.

Personal thanks go to the aforementioned Jay Celona, Pete Silipino, Becky Paullin (now Torok), and George Hayes, all of whom have helped keep the fires burning over the last three decades; my son Justin, who allowed me to experience the wonder of the *Star Wars* saga through a child's eyes; and my father Anthony and step-mom Heidi, who remain my two biggest supporters.

Posthumous thanks go to my grandfather, Joseph E. Berenato, who died at the age of 96 during the production of this book. He was the Ben Kenobi to my Luke Skywalker: strong, guiding, immensely wise, and vital to the last.[13]

And last, but certainly not least, thanks to my wife Helena, who continues to not leave me while I spend all of my free time thinking about

imaginary spacemen from a long time ago.

Chewie, We're Home: A Foreword

by Scott Chernoff

> This one, a long time have I watched.
>
> — Yoda, *The Empire Strikes Back*

Has it really been four decades since we started watching *Star Wars*? Of course, for many of us, "watching" hardly scratches the surface. Fans have been watching, thinking, playing, living this story for most of our lives.

We've all got a point of entry. For me, it was seeing the first movie during its original theatrical run, when I was just five years old. My mind was blown, and my life was changed. What about you? Did you, too, meet *Star Wars* when it first played in theaters in 1977? Or did you catch up with the original trilogy on VHS tapes in the '80s and '90s? Are you one of the grown-ups who was a kid when the second trilogy began in 1999? A child of the new millennium raised on *Clone Wars* cartoons and all six films on Blu-ray? Or maybe you're like my children, destined to experience *Star Wars* for the first time when the Force reawakens for another new run of movies later this year and beyond?

It's hard to believe – yet easy to understand – that we're now entering a third generation of *Star Wars* motion pictures, with no end in sight. This epic tale may have begun "a long time ago," but *Star Wars* is not just about the past – nor is it only something stretching into the future. No, *Star Wars* is *now*. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together.

And to think it all started with one little movie. All these years later, it's easy to forget that no one really saw *Star Wars* coming. Sure, now it's officially known as *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope*, but back in 1977, it was *just Star Wars*, with no episode number or subtitle in its opening text crawl. And speaking of that crawl, it may be hard to remember, but in '77,

even that was thrilling. While most reminisce about the revelation of the Imperial Star Destroyer soaring overhead right after the crawl – and, yes, that was truly spectacular – the simple sight of that now iconic text scrolling through the depths of space was brand-new. And what the hell was it talking about? A Death Star, a princess, Rebel spies, and a Galactic Empire?

This was going to be good.

Indeed, before I saw *Star Wars* at the tender age of five, it had never occurred to me that a movie could take place in outer space. But after *Star Wars*, if a movie *didn't* take place in outer space, I considered it a complete and utter failure on all accounts. After all, what was an earthbound skirmish compared to an all-out laser attack? Why bother with a simple sword if it didn't glow and make cool sounds?

But, of course, it was more than that. *Star Wars* opened my young mind to the possibilities of other worlds and other ways of living. It appealed to what I came to understand were our highest instincts – peace, courage, honor, love, trust – and insisted there was a hero inside each of us, ready to blast off. Beyond the epic space battles, crazy creatures, and limitless planets that sprang from the mind of George Lucas, *Star Wars* stood out in a cynical world with its message that good can triumph over evil, that one person can make a difference, and that we should trust in the ways of the universe. It was all so overwhelming that I had to see it several hundred times.

After the bright spectacle of *A New Hope*, there was the murky, moody intensity of *The Empire Strikes Back*, and all the questions it raised – about our true natures, and the struggle to persevere against odds that feel impossible (specifically, 3,720 to one). For some, those questions were answered too neatly in *Return of the Jedi*, but for me, by then 11 years old, the ultimate triumph – of light over dark, of the little guys (literally) taking down their oppressors – was reassuring, necessary, and inspiring.

These were the movies that fired my imagination and encouraged me to follow my own path in life. For a time, that path led me into the heart of the *Star Wars* universe in the real world, as I wrote for, and then edited, Lucasfilm's official magazine, *Star Wars Insider*.[14] I began during "the dark times" – the mid-1990s, when *Star Wars* had receded from pop-culture consciousness, and you could find old Kenner action figures at flea markets and garage sales for fire-sale prices. (So, actually, they were pretty great

times.) By the time I left the magazine in 2002, two prequels had been released, I'd written a behind-the-scenes book about one of them, and I had served as onstage host for the first official *Star Wars* Celebration fan event (and the second, and the fourth – like I said, pretty great times).

I was in the trenches for the saga's revival, beginning with the 20th-anniversary theatrical release of the *Special Editions*, which gloriously restored the original trilogy to its big-screen, state-of-the-art glory while simultaneously undermining its own greatness with needless changes and unwelcome additions. But the overall effect of the *Special Editions* was positive, as the joy of seeing *Star Wars* with a huge audience on a giant screen was back.

Then came the prequel trilogy. It's difficult for me to view *Episodes I* to *III* objectively, as I had the rare privilege of witnessing their development behind the scenes. Thus, I never saw *Episodes I* and *II* with fresh eyes, though I was lucky enough to watch the best of the prequels, *Revenge of the Sith*, unspoiled. My memories of the prequels are fond, but they are *my* memories: being on set for *Attack of the Clones*, or being flown to Skywalker Ranch to read the screenplay (which could never leave the room) for *The Phantom Menace*. I remember thinking that if something didn't seem great to me in that script, it must be because I didn't understand it, and it would surely be amazing in the finished film.

Indeed, there's a lot to love in the prequels, from John Williams' soaring "Duel of the Fates" scoring an epic lightsaber duel to the great Ian McDiarmid as Palpatine subtly manipulating a young Jedi into becoming an instrument of evil, and a benevolent Republic into an unforgiving Empire.

But longtime fans were, to say the least, split on these films. Some loved them unconditionally, while for others they fell flat. Yet something interesting happened: kids who were my age when I saw *A New Hope* loved *The Phantom Menace*. The essence of *Star Wars* shone through for them and proved once again how these stories, rooted in centuries of myth, are truly timeless.

This book is about those stories, as told on-screen. Yes, there are countless more tales told in the so-called Expanded Universe of *Star Wars* comics, books, and games. Those extensions will be chewed over

thoroughly in volumes two and three of this series. But this is volume one, and so we begin where we should: on the screen.

Luckily, this book examines not only the six *Star Wars* movies that have been released so far, but also the saga's many extrapolations for television, starting with the infamous *Star Wars Holiday Special* of 1978, an enigma that runs the gamut from so-bad-it's-good to so-bad-it's-awful and back again. Author Steven H. Wilson looks at it all: the bizarre, random array of guest stars (Beatrice Arthur! Jefferson Starship!); the core original cast (Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, and Carrie Fisher) all playing their *Star Wars* characters together for the only time on TV; the Wookiee-centric plot; the cringe-worthy dialogue; and the surprisingly excellent cartoon in the middle that introduced the world to Boba Fett.

There are even stranger corners of the on-screen *Star Wars* universe, all of which are very close to my heart as a fan of TV and a so-called professional in the world of comedy. I'm talking about when Luke, C-3PO, and Chewie (Hamill, Anthony Daniels, and Peter Mayhew), along with a robotic R2-D2, hosted *The Muppet Show*, and other times when *Star Wars* characters appeared on TV variety shows and in television commercials. Yes, they're wacky, but are they canon? I choose to believe they are, which is why I firmly believe that Artoo's most important mission ever was when he delivered an urgent holographic message to Oscar the Grouch on *Sesame Street*.

Of course, not every *Star Wars* TV appearance was played for laughs. Kevin Dilmore explores the two Ewok TV movies, *Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure* and *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor*, that closely *followed Return of the Jedi*. These were like parallel-universe *Star Wars* films, with Ewoks suddenly speaking English, a new and barely explained mysticism that had nothing to do with the Force, and Quaker Oats spokesman Wilford Brimley as a gruff curmudgeon with a heart of gold.

The Ewoks returned to television in the form of a Saturday-morning cartoon, and Jean-François Boivin takes us on a journey through the 1980s *Ewoks* animated series and its superior companion series, *Droids*, which followed the exploits of R2-D2 and C-3PO in the tradition of the acclaimed animated short that nearly saved the *Holiday Special*.

It’s time to light the lightsabers: Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), seen here with Fozzie Bear, hosted *The Muppet Show* in 1980.

The tradition continued into the next generation of *Star Wars* with the first of two *Clone Wars* animated series, which many (and by "many," I mean me) believe to be an artistic achievement eclipsing all three prequel films combined. David Pipgras goes in depth on this landmark short-form series. The second *Clone Wars* cartoon show was also no slouch, and Pipgras tells us why, while Nathan Butler takes a look at the newest animated series in the saga, Rebels.

Plus, Alex Newborn explores the exciting *Star Wars* film that can only be experienced in person at a Disney theme park, *Star Tours*. And novelist Dayton Ward brings all of these disparate detours together as he explores the strong parent-child bond that develops between adults who grew up on *Star Wars* stories, specials, and toys, and their children who are now doing the same.

But first, and rightly so, come the movies. Ian Dawe examines the original *Star Wars* in the context of 1970s sci-fi, specifically its relationship to George Lucas’s first feature film, *THX 1138*. Lou Tambone sizes up every possible angle of *The Empire Strikes Back*, perhaps the greatest *Star Wars* movie (or, just, movie) of all time, and Joe Bongiorno takes on what he considers the “failures” of *Return of the Jedi*. Meanwhile, Rich Handley, the accomplished co-editor of these books, explains why *Star Wars* and MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* are essentially the same movie.

Sequart's Julian Darius digs into the popular critical theory that *Star Wars* "ruined" cinema, while Matthew Sunrich zeroes in on the ecology of Tatooine as the epicenter of the movies, and Rocko Jerome does some deep thinking on the nature of love and emotion among the Jedi and the Sith. Zaki Hasan and Keith DeCandido, meanwhile, help us make sense of the prequels from different perspectives, and Joseph F. Berenato, the other co-editor of these anthologies, leads a perhaps long-overdue reconsideration of *The Phantom Menace*, with a special section about fan-made edits of that film.

That's 17 thought-provoking essays, and still we will have barely begun to dive into the *Star Wars* saga. Volumes two and three will be about the Expanded Universe, and I have no doubt we will eventually need a volume four to cover the third theatrical trilogy, the spinoff movies, and whatever else may be headed our way.

After all, always in motion is the future.

From *THX* to *Star Wars*: Rethinking George Lucas's Place in American Science-Fiction Cinema

by Ian Dawe

Science fiction and fantasy were among the first genres that the cinema sought to explore, almost from the moment of the medium's invention. The ability of film to create hallucinatory images and an atmosphere of unreality, combined with the carnival-style promotion of early film to show something "fantastic," made the genre an obvious creative choice. But from the days of Georges M é li è s's *A Trip to the Moon* in 1902, the cinema also seems to have struggled with science fiction. In literature and comic books, however, the genre developed to quite a refined state as the 20th Century went on, reaching astonishingly mature literary heights in the 1940s and 1950s; mid-century science fiction cinema, though, lagged and sputtered.

Science-fiction cinema seems, historically, to have suffered unduly from a lack of internal confidence, and a lack of awareness of where the audience for these films was. Films either became childish "adventure stories," such as *The Phantom Planet* (1961), or ultra-serious grim military affairs, like *Destination Moon* (1950) or *Marooned* (1969). "Bad" science fiction, stripped of any ideas and simply exploiting costumes, poses, and strange names, became frightfully easy to make in those years. Even Ed Wood took a turn with *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959), long considered to be the worst film ever made. Very few films were able to combine intellectually interesting science notions and believable visual effects, and still be entertaining. The list of films prior to the late 1960s matching those

qualities is very short indeed, with perhaps *Forbidden Planet* (1956) and *War of the Worlds* (1953) being the two most obvious.

One issue is genre creep: films labeled as science fiction were rarely "pure" sci-fi, instead borrowing elements of Gothic horror, Westerns, war movies, and sailing adventures. This produced a very leaky medium conceptually, with various artists bringing their own predilections to bear on the genre and making each science-fiction film simply a different kind of genre hybrid.

That was the environment in which Stanley Kubrick approached Arthur C. Clarke with the notion of making "the proverbial good science-fiction movie."[15] Their *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) was a true game-changer. The film exudes confidence, not just in its ideas but also in the genre and in the audience. Kubrick, as a filmmaker, had a clear vision and practiced the art of artistic withholding. He trusted that the audience for this film didn't need a lot of expository dialogue, didn't need the environment of space explained to them (characters don't go around saying things like "There's no gravity in space!"), and could make up their own minds about the baffling ending. It was a true piece of cinematic art, and elevated a sadly neglected and uncomfortable genre back to its rightful place at the center of the cinematic landscape.

But the paradigm shift that *2001* ushered in, taking science-fiction film back into the art house and away from the drive-in theater, was not destined to last. In less than a decade, *Star Wars* would return science-fiction film to the land of genre hybridization and adventure stories. The film itself, and George Lucas's artistic instincts, however, emerged from the art-house science fiction of his treasured student film, *Electronic Labyrinth: THX 1138 4EB* (1971), not from an impulse to undo all of the artistic progress of *2001*. Lucas's "pure cinema" of sound and movement, and his infamous lack of regard for character and story, cast him as an artistic director rather than a maker of popular cinema. Therefore, one of the most fascinating aspects of *Star Wars* is how, even though it re-popularized the pulp serial-style action-adventure film, it springs from a dedicated and ultra-serious cinema theory and filmmaker. The path from *THX* to *Star Wars* is both shorter and longer than it sometimes seems.

A major aspect of analysis in this chapter will be to try and view the first *Star Wars* film with fresh eyes, not from the viewpoint of fans of the

series, and even at times disregarding the sequels and prequels, in order to view *Star Wars* in strictly cinematic terms. We must consider it as a *film*, no more or less, from the late 1970s, produced by an auteur with very peculiar obsessions and tastes. When viewed in this context, *Star Wars*becomes more than the defining space opera of an era – it becomes a fascinating cinematic exercise, an extension of Lucas's development of "pure cinema," and the true inheritor of the tradition of *THX 1138*.

George Lucas, Film Student

It is significant to our understanding of *Star Wars* to paint a small portrait of George Lucas, the film student, and note how many of those tendencies remained in George Lucas, the filmmaker.

As a film student at the University of Southern California in the mid-1960s, Lucas rapidly developed a distinctive style. From his years of interest in photography (a fascination he developed after a car accident sidelined his first love, automobiles), Lucas was drawn to the technical aspects of animation and editing. His student films were not plot-driven, but instead were a series of images and sounds, edited together in quick succession like a cinematic collage, creating their own rhythms. Character, acting, drama, and story were of little importance to this kind of filmmaking, which Lucas has sometimes referred to as being "pure cinema." His other primary interest, and experience, was in documentary film.

Both experimental cinema and documentaries seemed to appeal to Lucas's sensibilities. They both require a great deal of time to be spent in the editing process, which creates a direct relationship – in those days, literally a tactile relationship – between director and film. It's a style that appeals to a solitary "tinkerer" rather than the traditional bullhorn-wielding Hollywood director. But both styles also allowed Lucas to almost entirely remove himself from the necessity of human interaction, particularly with his Maysles[16]-influenced documentary style in which the goal is simply to record an event without influencing it. Always socially awkward, Lucas found his perfect place in the film world early on, and only later found himself uncomfortably wearing the title of Hollywood director.

The culmination of his cinematic education was his graduation film, which won several prizes in 1967, the year in which he graduated. That film was a 15-minute short titled *Electronic Labyrinth: THX 1138 4EB*. Based on a story originally conceived by classmates Matthew Robbins and Walter Murch, the film is an astonishingly experimental piece of art. It consists essentially of nothing but seemingly random clips edited together, with shots of people in white overalls operating machinery, juxtaposed with close-ups of faces and superimposed lettering saying things like “THX EB” and “LUH.” Only toward the end does any kind of narrative emerge, featuring the main character, THX, trying to escape from the titular “electronic labyrinth.” There are shots of THX running through corridors, appearing on view screens in the control center, and finally managing to open a door to the outside world. There is no dialogue in the conventional sense, nor are there any true performances to tell the story – simply sound and movement.

This short student film seems to capture the essence of the George Lucas style of filmmaking, and is the purest example of his auteur sensibilities. Even the full-length version of *THX 1138*, with all of its eccentricity and experimental nature, is diluted by the need to create characters, give them dialogue, and play out scenes of drama. This was never something in which Lucas excelled, but in the blending of image and sound to create kinetic movement he has few peers.

It is also significant to the development of Lucas as an artist and powerful filmmaker to note that this short film was his calling card in the early days. When Francis Ford Coppola speaks today of Lucas’s potential as a filmmaker, he’s referring to this type of film and his documentaries, not to *Star Wars*.[17] Both in his perception of his own abilities, and in the perceptions of his peers, Lucas was an experimental filmmaker, uncomfortable in the world of conventional narrative cinema. His interest in science fiction was genuine enough, but when one surveys the landscape of 1970s sci-fi films, there is little that would appeal to a student of pure cinema like Lucas.

Sci-Fi in the Seventies: Go Big or Go Weird

Science fiction in the 1970s, put in grotesquely over-simplistic terms, lacked ambition and confidence. The films were either elaborately produced and problematic adaptations of pulp novels (pitched at children) or utterly serious, slow-moving, joyless technological exercises with ham-fisted moral messages (pitched at adults). There was a self-consciousness about them, a careful pulling back at the edges, that gives them away as less than committed artistic endeavors. Though the 1970s were a time when science-fiction fandom was evolving into its modern form, including the development of fan conventions and fan fiction, film studios didn't seem to understand where the audience was for these types of movies.[18]

The most influential science-fiction film in recent memory, up to that point, had been *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and that movie spawned some immediate progeny in the form of the 1972 film *Silent Running*, directed by special effects technician Douglas Trumbull. Trumbull had worked on *2001* and had an abiding interest in the possibilities of photography and film. Later in the 1970s, he would apply a great deal of skill and artistry to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and, later still, *Blade Runner*. But in *Silent Running*, Trumbull had to function as a dramatist as well as an experimental photographer, and tell a coherent story.

Silent Running reflects some of the preoccupations of the early 1970s counterculture, especially environmental protection and the development of a modern ecocentric worldview. In the film, Bruce Dern plays an astronaut ecologist, tending to the last forests of Earth within geodesic domes attached to a spacecraft. When a message comes from Earth that the forests should be destroyed and his spaceship should return home, Dern's character mutinies and steals the ship, fleeing beyond the orbit of Saturn with the last forests. Pursued, he eventually destroys his own vessel and sacrifices himself, launching the last forest dome into space where it can be kept safe.

Though it makes some attempt at wit (Dern is accompanied by three small robots named Huey, Dewey, and Louie[19]), *Silent Running* is a deadly serious film, and its humorless, stern approach to environmental politics is one of its weakest points. Science fiction is, of course, a genre often used metaphorically, but here the metaphor is completely "on the nose" and sadly labored.

That labored quality, shared alas by many science-fiction films of the 1970s, may be the result of the needs of those films to conform to

conventional notions of narrative and plot, despite being ostensibly experimental. Trumbull, a master effects technician, renders out scenes of ships flying through the rings of Saturn with true grace and beauty, and has no trouble assembling a good sequence. But he and his collaborators (and their contemporaries) seem to lack the artistic courage to commit entirely to a new form of filmmaking, based on real and understandable marketplace needs.

The marketplace and the audience were, no doubt, major factors in why so many films of this era, such as *Zardoz* (1974), *Westworld* (1973), and *Logan's Run* (1976), were produced with a pulp audience in mind. These films most assuredly were not the spawn of *2001*, but rather were extensions of a 1950s pulp tradition, emphasizing self-conscious "oddness," scantily clad women, and men with guns. Alongside all of this pulp energy, some of these films still made stabs at high-minded concepts of future societies, or metaphorical critiques of the modern world. Labored and obvious, these "messages" rested uneasily in this environment at times. Most likely, the priority of the two concepts of science fiction – high-minded notions and pulp thrills – varied from film to film, with some originating from source material that was, in fact, cerebral and "goosed" for pulp excitement (*Logan's Run*), and others firmly in the pulp tradition but filled with so many middlebrow notions that they simply float away in too much arbitrary strangeness (*Zardoz*).

Logan's Run is an excellent example of the tendencies of mid-'70s science fiction. Like *Silent Running*, it features a city based on the geodesic dome, but set in a dystopian 23rd Century. Beautiful young people live in this immaculately groomed environment until the age of 30, at which point they are invited to participate in a mass execution euphemistically known as "carousel." If an individual fails to report to the execution, he or she is labeled a "runner," and is hunted down by government-sponsored hit men known as "sandmen."

Logan, the title character, is a sandman sent on a mission to hunt down such runners, some of whom speak of a place called Sanctuary where they will be kept safe, but soon finds himself being hunted by his fellow sandmen. The film then essentially becomes an extensive chase scene, in which Logan and a fetching young lady named Jessica face a number of

challenges and adventures, then finally escape into the fresh air of Earth, where civilization has long since been abandoned.

On the surface, and particularly based solely on the plot description, *Logan's Run* might appear to be a film very similar to *THX 1138*. Both are dystopian, both feature characters escaping from the confines of their society, and both essentially end when that escape is realized. But that's where the similarity ends. *Logan's Run*, even in the chase sequences, suffers from unconvincing sets, preposterous costumes, and a classic cinematic style in which camera movement is minimized and shots are blocked and lit in an utterly conventional way. Actors are made up to look pretty or handsome, and even the stabs it takes at representing a grim reality (some of the characters met along the way are "mutants") had been bested almost a decade prior on the original *Star Trek* series. (A low point must be a woefully unconvincing robot whom the characters encounter in their journey, shiny and brightly lit but obviously an actor in a haphazard costume, barely above the quality seen on the contemporary *Doctor Who* TV series.)

The main difference between *Logan's Run* and *THX 1138*, in terms of understanding what set George Lucas apart from his contemporaries, is that *THX* doesn't try to explain anything. Lucas withholds exposition and explanation. Characters don't describe to each other how the world they're living in works, and there is no dramatic ending that finally relates everything back to an understandable place and time. While *Logan's Run* has a long, exposition-filled ending featuring Peter Ustinov and the overgrown ruins of Washington, D.C., preaching a cautionary tale about nuclear responsibility and celebrating life passages, *THX* isn't even explicitly set on Earth. It may be so, but that is never specified. Rather, in *THX*, the film's moral messages about unbridled consumerism and blind adherence to tradition are shown and demonstrated in an abstract way by the characters and action.

This lack of specificity and commitment to concept reflected an internal artistic confidence that other films of the period lacked. This confidence would transfer over and make *Star Wars* the film it was, because for all its fantasy and plot-driven elements, the film clearly springs from the same mind that made *THX*, not the minds that created *Logan's Run* or its ilk. Lucas consistently, in this process, played to his strengths as an artist, even

though the enormous success of *Star Wars* and the industry it spawned seem far removed from the artist who created “pure cinema.”

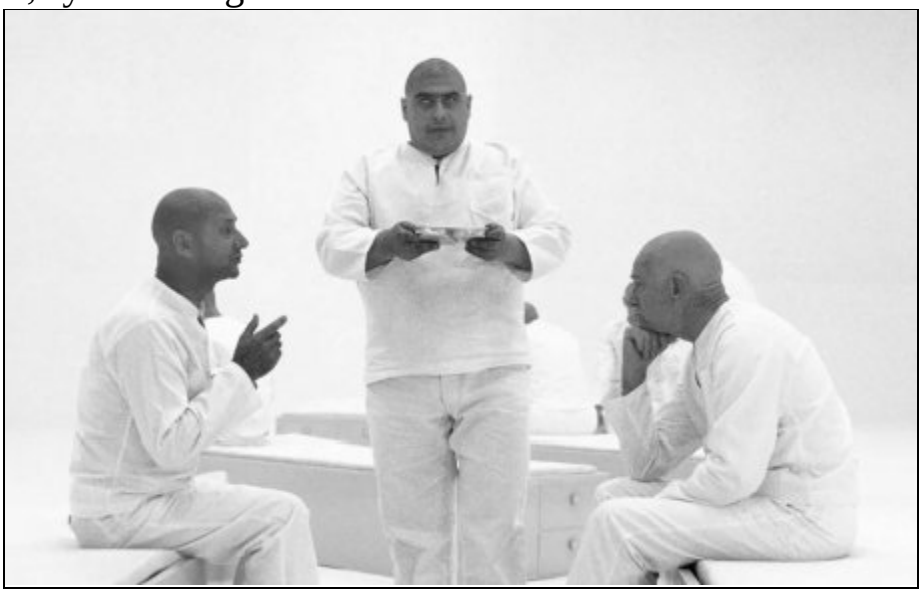
Actor Robert Duvall receives direction from George Lucas on the set of *THX 1138*.

Connecting *THX* to *Star Wars*

One problem with *Star Wars* is that the public saw it as one sort of film, whereas George Lucas saw it as another, and thus miscast Lucas as an auteur. When looked upon in the context of his sensibilities, the film’s strengths become more obvious: the transitions between scenes and the coordination of movement, music, and sound in that cinematic opera style are what linger in the viewer’s imagination. The drama and the often-strange dialogue have, of course, become part of the popular culture vernacular, but that was Lucas’s weak point as an auteur. Even with *Star Wars*, his editors had to take the film out of his hands and carefully trim each dramatic scene such that their pace matched that of the true pure cinema sequences, such as the dogfight over the Death Star.

But Lucas himself excels in *Star Wars* in the same way he excelled in *THX 1138 4EB* all those years prior: in the blending of abstract images, sounds, and visual stimulation that somehow tells a very simple and deeply affecting story. Luke Skywalker skimming the trench blends everything Lucas loved about cinema and indeed about life: fast-moving machines, pure visual cinema closer to animation than live action, and the ever-present sentiment of freedom, of running from the technological into the human. The mantra “use the Force” is simply one expression of that theme, as Luke finally switches his computer off, putting his faith in life energy and

escaping technology. The final shot from the battle, of the Death Star exploding, is essentially the same as the final shot in *THX 1138*: a giant round light, symbolizing freedom.



The all-white motif of *THX 1138* contributed to its abstract, highly metaphorical concepts.

Placed side by side, *THX 1138* and *Star Wars*appear very much as the product of the same imagination, with the same creative vision. One auteur sensibility that Lucas always exuded was tenacity – or stubbornness, to be slightly less charitable. Lucas insisted as a student, and as a professional, on having the last word and in doing things his way, no matter what the opinions of others might be. In this sense, his most fortunate encounter may have been with Alan Ladd, Jr., who was the perfect studio executive for him, one who would back every creative decision and never interfere with the production. Ladd backed auteurs: as he later said when Ridley Scott, another artist whom he championed, was going to be removed from *Blade Runner*, "No, we bought a Ridley Scott picture."[20] He was the same with Lucas, and allowed him to be himself, within the limits of an agreed-upon budget and schedule.

Lucas's champion on *THX 1138* was no less than Francis Ford Coppola, playing precisely the same role. Whatever changes were made to *Star Wars*prior to the film's release – and we know that there were many other hands at work, including editors Richard Chew and Paul Hirsch, the special effects team led by John Dykstra, and John Williams providing the music –

there is no question that the person in charge was George Lucas, and that the film reflects his own peculiar sensibilities and preoccupations.

THX 1138 chooses a very limited color scheme, essentially all white, with rooms painted white, and with characters dressed in white and often appearing against an infinite "white space" created by an enormous white backdrop. There is very little about their world that is decorative, and, when combined with the actors all having bald heads, it renders the film in an abstract, highly metaphorical conceptual space. *Star Wars* also featured white costumes and simple decor, partially out of economic necessity (the budget for elaborate costumes simply wasn't there) and partially out of an impulse to keep those aspects of the film quiet and simple, not calling attention to themselves and allowing the audience to focus on other things. This, of course, has the same effect as in *THX*: the audience isn't looking at the costumes – it's watching what happens and thinking about the ideas presented.

Another important technique developed on *THX 1138* that would be used extensively in *Star Wars* is the re-photographed video image, giving a "hologram" effect. Seen frequently throughout the theatrical version of *THX 1138*, and even glimpsed in an early form in *THX 1138 4EB*, the images look startlingly like modern holograms, when, in fact, the technology used to produce them is quite old-fashioned. The subject is filmed normally, against a black background, and the footage is played back on a TV monitor and re-photographed. Then, the image can be composited into the final shot, seemingly partially transparent, with figures suspended in space. All of the TV programs watched by Robert Duvall's character THX in *THX 1138* are created in this manner, for example. The most famous use, however, is Princess Leia's message to Obi-Wan Kenobi, hidden inside R2-D2 in *Star Wars*.

The Future is here.
THX 1138
Warner Bros. presents THX 1138 · An American Zoetrope Production · Starring Robert Duvall and Donald Pleasence · with Don Pedro Colley, Maggie McOmie and Ian Wolfe · Technicolor® · Techniscope® · Executive Producer, Francis Ford Coppola · Screenplay by George Lucas and Walter Murch · Story by George Lucas Produced by Lawrence Sturhahn · Directed by George Lucas · Music by Lalo Schifrin

The poster for *THX 1138* featured futuristic, silver-faced, robotic motorcycle police who, in the film, partake in chase sequences that are direct cinematic precursers to the Battle of Yavin in *Star Wars*.

But at no point in either film do characters find it necessary to comment on the technology, just as we would not find it necessary to comment on how a television works. The effect *appears* very high-tech, but also resembles a technology we know well, with its scan lines and muted, patchy colors. If this were a magical mirror or an image appearing in a crystal, for example, or any number of other more fantastic and outlandish effects, our

belief might be more difficult to suspend. But because Lucas grounded the effect in an understandable technology, the audience accepts it and moves on, just like with the costumes. (Compare this to the technology in *Logan's Run*, which bears little or no resemblance to modern mechanics and thus appears arbitrary and strange, detached from any laws of physics or science we understand.)

It's fairly well-known that Lucas is an automobile enthusiast who has enjoyed racing cars since his youth. This is a very significant personal obsession in terms of his approach to film. Not only are fast cars a useful metaphor for his thematic obsessions (escape, most prominently), but their visual dynamics, the varying speeds at which objects closer or farther away pass, the Z-axis movement: all of this is an essential part of his visual cinematic sensibility. Even the sounds are important and deliver relevant information in racing cars – not only the sounds of the engine that might signify mechanical issues, but also the Doppler effect of cars approaching and passing. There's a musicality to the sound that is clearly influential on Lucas's approach to soundtracks in all of his films, but particularly *THX 1138* and *Star Wars*.

In *THX*, there are several long car-chase sequences involving futuristic cars and motorcycles, with silver-faced, robotic-looking motorcycle police. Making extensive use of the tunnels of the BART[21] system in San Francisco, Lucas creates a dynamic and colorful effect, capturing the police lights reflecting off the surfaces of the tunnel as cars speed by. The sound, designed by Walter Murch, is also musical and interesting, with the motorcycle engine sounds re-pitched and treated to sound both familiar and exotic. This sequence has a direct successor in *Star Wars*, in the famous final scenes at the Battle of Yavin, particularly in the "skimming the trench" sequence at the film's climax. The sequence, although it features flying spaceships, is really not a flying sequence at all, but rather a racing sequence. The presence of the trench robs the action of much of its third dimension, restricting all motion to one direction, just as on a race track. Aircraft, though they do move at high speeds, rarely if ever fly that fast or that low to the ground. Pilots are never able to look out their windows and see stationary scenery scrolling by rapidly; they are never close enough to do something like that, because of the hazards involved. The sequence is

clearly in the language of automobiles, entirely consistent with Lucas's sensibilities.[22]

Aside from the visual common elements between the two films, there are important thematic texts in play. Both *Star Wars* and *THX 1138* feature shots of individuals in an elaborate control center, resembling a cross between a TV studio and the controls of a nuclear power plant. These individuals are part of a dehumanizing apparatus, driven by machines to execute instructions with efficiency. (The sequences that show THX at work in his factory job even depict the main character as complicit with the authoritarian imperatives.) This theme is present in a slightly altered form in *Star Wars*, in which the "controllers" are the Imperial authorities, and the control center on the Death Star bears a distinct resemblance to that of *THX*, even in the sound effects used to populate and animate the environment. In *THX*, the absolute authority figure is never seen, and may not exist as such, but the individuals are operating under strict order. Likewise, in *Star Wars*, the Emperor is mentioned but never shown until the sequels, though it is made more explicit in the form of Darth Vader and Grand Moff Tarkin. Vader, in fact, with his blend of mechanism and machine, is a direct descendent of the sorts of dark forces in operation and the metaphor of humanity becoming stuck in a machine in *THX 1138*.[23]

But for all the similarities between *THX 1138* and *Star Wars*, one is clearly viewed as an art film, the other as an entertaining, popular film. This is not without reason, as *Star Wars* is a fantasy adventure drawing from popular myths and science-fiction serials, but it's important to note that this is George Lucas's take on that mythology, and it is filtered through *his* sensibilities. *Star Wars* is a very peculiar film when viewed in this light. Its presentation of the "used future," the relative lack of explanation of technology or society, the alternation of slightly stiff dialogue scenes with the much more effective scenes of movement and action, and the sheer confidence it has in its own ideas, is almost without precedent. The pace and the rhythm of the film, with its emphasis on visual montage rather than character-driven drama, is in a decidedly different key from all other science-fiction films of the time, but is understandable in the context of Lucas's other work.

From *Episode IV* to *Episode I*

"I haven't changed much over the years," George Lucas said in 2004. [24] This is an astute bit of self-observation, and one that somewhat defuses criticism of his *Star Wars* prequel trilogy, produced between 1999 and 2005. All three of those films highlight Lucas's familiar sensibilities, emphasizing movement over character, shying away from explaining technology, and embracing the themes of escapes, car races, and pure visual cinema, now enhanced by computer graphics. The prequel trilogy represents Lucas's response to his own work on *Star Wars*, and if they are not entirely successful as films, this may largely be because Lucas didn't have his strong collaborators to smooth out his bad auteur tendencies. But it could also be because Lucas, after all the intervening years, had developed an impression of the *Star Wars* films different from the majority of the rest of his audience.

As an experimental filmmaker, making an experimental and different kind of film, Lucas had at least partially succeeded in bringing his vision to life with the initial *Star Wars* movie. His involvement with the subsequent films would be less direct, and thus the series took on a life of its own, retaining much of Lucas's influence in the visuals, but in the hands of others focusing more on character than Lucas would be inclined to do, and even allowing the actors to improvise dialogue. Therefore, the prequels can be read as George Lucas aping the style developed on *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* to the best of his ability, rather than fully committing to his own artistic inclinations. The balance between satisfying his moviegoing audience and satisfying himself is sometimes precarious in these later films, with even Lucas himself admitting, in the case of *The Phantom Menace*, that he may have "gone too far."[25]

However much audience expectation there was for the prequels, there was none whatsoever for the first *Star Wars* film, and Lucas could thus take the time necessary to find the right tone and pace for his movie, satisfying only his own artistic impulses – which, as we have seen, come from a very different place than the majority of contemporary science-fiction cinema, and which helped to make *Star Wars* so unique. When viewed through the lens presented here, as the product of a singular American auteur

filmmaker, *Star Wars* rests quite comfortably alongside *THX 1138* as a genuine piece of experimental and committed filmmaking.

Luke, Dorothy, and the Hero's Journey: We're Not on Tatooine Anymore, (Ar)To-(Dee)To

by Rich Handley

> *The Empire Strikes Back* joins *The Godfather, Part II* as one of the rarest of films – a sequel that lives up to and expands upon its original... It's not an exaggeration to compare the world of *Star Wars* to the Land of Oz. The *Star Wars* saga – a series of nine planned films – promises to be an even more complete world than Oz, and just as enduring. The appeal of visiting Oz is that it is a magical place over the rainbow. The appeal of *Star Wars* and, now, *The Empire Strikes Back*, is that it also takes us to a magical place – the childhood of our mind.
>
> — Gene Siskel, *Chicago Tribune*, 1980

It has been well-documented that George Lucas, in creating *Star Wars*, was influenced by several prior works, including Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Frederick Stephani's *Flash Gordon* serials, William Wyler's *Ben-Hur*, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, John Ford's *The Searchers*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Richard Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung*, and more. *Star Wars* also borrows aspects of several religions, particularly Christianity and Buddhism; philosophies, such as Taoism and Confucianism; history, especially that of World Wars I and II, and of the Roman Empire; and medieval concepts like knighthood and chivalry. But another possible inspiration is often overlooked: MGM's 1939 film adaptation of L. Frank Baum's 1900 children's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

On the surface, this may seem an absurd comparison – after all, one is a space opera about a ragtag team of freedom fighters in a galaxy far, far away, trying to destroy a space station, while the other features a young girl

and her companions skipping down a yellow-brick road to a castle so she can catch a ride back to Kansas. But while there's no direct evidence that Lucas consciously borrowed from Baum's tales, there are a surprising number of direct parallels between the MGM classic (simply titled *The Wizard of Oz*) and Lucasfilm's 1977 sci-fi epic.

The Heroes

When we first meet Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, he is a frustrated, orphaned teenager living on a desert moisture farm with his Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru Lars. Dissatisfied with his boring, uneventful existence, Luke longs for a chance to someday leave the desolate world of Tatooine behind and seek adventure out among the stars. A universe of wonders awaits him, if only he could convince his aunt and uncle to let him apply to the space academy (which he learned about while listening to recruitment tapes, according to NPR's *Star Wars Radio Drama*).

Likewise, our introduction to Dorothy Gale in the MGM film shows her living on the remote, dusty farm of her Aunt Emily (affectionately called "Auntie Em") and Uncle Henry, located on the prairies of Kansas. Although the movie never identifies her as an orphan, Baum's first Oz novel notes that this is so. Dissatisfied with the dull mundanity of farming, Dorothy stares at the heavens, wishing that she, like bluebirds flying in the sky, could journey "somewhere over the rainbow." There, she believes, exists a land where dreams come true (which she heard about once in a lullaby, according to her iconic ballad).

Luke has few friends with whom to fraternize. The Lars homestead is located in an isolated expanse of endless sand; he has no siblings or cousins on the farm; two of his buddies, Biggs and Tank, have already left for space; and Owen discourages him from hanging out with other idle teens at Tosche Station. As such, he spends much of his time alone and disgruntled, his only companions the labor droids that work on the farm. A deleted scene features Luke hanging out with local teens Windy, Camie, and Fixer, but it is clear that he is an outsider among them. Luke yearns to join Tank and Biggs, yet feels obligated to remain with his aunt and uncle, who have raised him as their own.

Dorothy is similarly isolated from her peers, as the Gale farm is located in rural Kansas, and she appears to be the only person there her age, since the elderly Gales have no young children of their own. Therefore, she spends most of her time playing with her pet terrier, Toto, or chatting with farmhands Hunk, Zeke, and Hickory, though the fact that they are adults and she is their employers' young niece presents a barrier to true friendship. Dorothy wishes that she could seek adventure beyond the farm, but Em and Henry have given her a loving home, and so she stays.

The Caregivers

Although Luke urges Owen to let him follow in his friends' footsteps, his uncle delays the youth's departure, asking him to stay for just one more season and help with the harvest. Ignoring Luke's concerns, Owen impatiently chastises his nephew for daydreaming instead of doing his chores (specifically, fixing a broken moisture vaporator).

Similarly, Dorothy feels ignored and overlooked by the adults around her. Em loses patience with her niece's immaturity at one point, telling her to find someplace to stay out of trouble. When crotchety neighbor Almira Gulch threatens to have Toto euthanized, Henry and Em pay little attention to how this upsets Dorothy, more concerned as they are with their farm chores (namely, fixing a broken incubator).

Annoyed that Owen consistently puts the farm's needs above his, Luke storms out of the room in a huff. It is clear that the Lars couple care for their nephew, but they have a farm to run and are determined to keep him safe from harm. Beru (whose sole function in the film is to serve dinner and blue milk) empathizes with the youth, but acquiesces to her husband's wishes because they have made a promise to take care of Anakin's son.

When the Gales agree to give up Toto, despite Dorothy's pleas to the contrary, the teen throws a fit and decides to run away. Although Henry and Em have great affection for their niece, they, too, must make running the farm their priority. Em (who walks around the farm giving everyone crullers to snack on) feels bad about having to do this, but gives in because of a sheriff's order authorizing the cruel Gulch to take possession of the dog.

Owen’s entire life seems centered around hard work, from dawn until dusk. Gruff and grizzled, he spends most of his scenes scowling or looking dour. Beru, as shown in *Attack of the Clones*, came to live with him at the Lars family farm while she was young and pretty. Twenty-two years later, the older Beru seems somewhat sadder than her younger self. Both have grown grey and weathered by this time, appearing elderly rather than middle-aged despite being in their 40s, presumably due to their harsh life of moisture farming.

In describing Uncle Henry in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Baum notes that the man “never laughed,” adding, “He worked hard from morning till night and did not know what joy was. He was gray also, from his long beard to his rough boots, and he looked stern and solemn, and rarely spoke.” As for Dorothy’s aunt, the author writes:

> When Aunt Em came there to live she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled now.

The Sidekicks

Luke’s adventure beyond the farm begins with the family’s newly purchased astromech droid, R2-D2, a non-human, non-speaking servant. The short, lovable robot has a tendency to get into trouble. When Owen tells Luke to have the droids’ memory wiped (the droid equivalent of a death sentence), R2-D2 tricks the teen into removing his restraining bolt so he can escape from the farm and seek out Obi-Wan Kenobi beyond the Dune Sea.

For Dorothy, the journey commences when lovable little Toto, her non-human, non-speaking pet (the letters of whose name are actually contained in “Artoo-Detoo”) escapes from Gulch’s clutches and runs back to his owner. To protect her beloved dog from being put to death, Dorothy takes Toto and runs away from the farm, out among the prairies.

Artoo’s defiance of the Empire and his new owners brings a galaxy of trouble down on Luke’s head. And yet, at the same time, Artoo also saves Luke’s life and enables the Rebellion to prevail — had the youth not gone out to find the errant droid, he most surely would have been slaughtered

along with his aunt and uncle, and thus could not have destroyed the Death Star.

In essence, Toto's defiance of Gulch is responsible for the dangers that later befall Dorothy as well. And yet, despite that fact, the dog's actions arguably better the lives of everyone in Oz — had Dorothy not run after him, she would have never been swept away in the storm, and thus would not have defeated the two Wicked Witches.

Artwork created by Don Rosa (pencils) and William Fugate (inks) for *Rockets Blast Comicollector* #139's *Star Wars* Special (Oct 1977), published by James Van Hise.

The Good Witches

In tracking down R2-D2, Luke encounters “Old Ben” Kenobi in the desert. A former Jedi Knight, he is capable of harnessing a mystical energy field called the Force to accomplish seeming feats of magic, such as telepathically influencing the thoughts of the weak-minded. Owen warns Luke to stay away from Obi-Wan, telling him, “That wizard is just a crazy old man.”

In protecting Toto, Dorothy meets a traveling magician named Professor Marvel, who claims to be able to perform numerous mystical feats, such as reading minds. Later in the film, the actor who plays Marvel, Frank Morgan, also portrays the Wizard of Oz, who rants like a crazy old man.

Obi-Wan brings Luke to his small hovel. The former Jedi lives alone, a hermit in humble surroundings, and has little in the way of furnishings since his needs are meager. Kenobi gives Luke a lightsaber that once belonged to the youth’s father. The mysterious weapon of the Jedi Knights, from a bygone age, emits a beam of light through the use of a crystal.

Likewise, Marvel invites Dorothy into the simple covered wagon in which he lives and travels. There, he pretends to view her future by consulting a mystical sphere that he claims is a magical crystal from ancient Egypt, once used by the priests of Isis and Osiris.

Obi-Wan is kindly toward Luke and has his best interests in mind. Though he could probably use his mental abilities to coerce Luke into helping him, he instead lets the teen follow his heart and do what he thinks is right. In the end, Luke decides to accompany Ben, who provides him with a mission to complete: helping him see the droids safely delivered to Princess Leia Organa’s foster-father on Alderaan.

The kindly Professor Marvel, realizing that Dorothy is a runaway and that her guardians are likely worried about her, tells her a gentle lie intended to make her follow her heart and return to her family, rather than employing charlatan tricks to take advantage of her naïveté, as he might with other passersby. In the end, she decides to do what he suggests: returning to the safety of the farm and the foster-parents who miss her.

What Obi-Wan does not tell Luke (and what Lucas does not disclose to the audience until *The Empire Strikes Back*) is that his father is actually Darth Vader, who became a Sith Lord and ceased to be Anakin Skywalker. Ben explains this away, in *Return of the Jedi*, by claiming that his previous statements about Luke’s parentage were correct “from a certain point of

view.” Luke feels a bit betrayed by this, but it’s important to remember that had Luke known the truth from the outset, he might not have chosen to go on the adventure with Kenobi in the first place, out of shock, and evil might very well have prevailed.

Dorothy is also missing a key piece of the puzzle, thanks to a second magic-user named Glinda, the Good Witch of the North. Unlike Professor Marvel, Glinda can actually perform feats of magic. What she neglects to reveal is that all Dorothy ever really needed to do is tap her heels together and chant “There’s no place like home.” Her entire journey in the film is thus unnecessary for Dorothy, who could have gone home anytime she liked. It is vital that she stay and carry out her mission, however, from the standpoint of Oz, for unless the teen follows that yellow-brick road, the Wicked Witch might succeed in taking over the land.

It is interesting to note that Glinda’s situation is the result of an editorial conflation made when Baum’s novel was adapted for film. In the book, there are actually two Good Witches: the Good Witch of the South (Glinda), and the Good Witch of the North (whom Baum named Locasta in a 1902 musical). Locasta greets Dorothy when she arrives in Oz, while Glinda reveals the way home at the conclusion of her adventure. By combining them into a single individual, the film has Glinda sending Dorothy on a journey that she should know full well is entirely avoidable (given how bubble-headed Glinda acts in the movie, it’s entirely possible she forgot this fact).

The Journey Begins

Luke returns home, only to find that a catastrophic event has taken place: the murder of Owen and Beru by Imperial troops. In searching for R2-D2 and C-3PO, the stormtroopers have decimated the farm and burnt the bodies of his aunt and uncle before they could seek refuge in their underground home. Luke later finds their corpses and feels helpless.

Back in Kansas, Dorothy’s home also suffers a catastrophe, as a massive cyclone plows across the area, leaving devastation in its wake. As the farm is buffeted by dangerously high winds, Em, Henry, and the farmhands hurry belowground into the farm’s cellar to protect themselves from the storm. Dorothy is not so lucky, however, and feels helpless.

Left alone, with nothing remaining for him on Tatooine, Luke agrees to join Obi-Wan on his quest to Alderaan, and he finds himself swept up in a metaphorical maelstrom of warfare that ultimately carries him out into space. It's no wonder that he (and pretty much every major character in the series at some point) later mutters, "I have a bad feeling about this."

Unable to reach the shelter in time, Dorothy finds herself alone in the face of a deadly (and decidedly non-metaphorical) maelstrom and, along with the house, is swept up by the cyclone and carried up into the sky. "Toto," she tells her faithful pet, "I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

Luke's first stop on his adventure with Obi-Wan Kenobi is Mos Eisley Spaceport. Unlike the endless beige of Luke's moisture farm, Mos Eisley, described by Kenobi as a "wretched hive of scum and villainy," is colorful and bizarre. The city is filled with unusual creatures, the likes of whom Luke has never before seen, some resembling such Earth animals as wolves, walruses, and goats. Two drunken bar patrons (including said "walrus man") try to pick a fight with him.

The same is true of Dorothy's journey to Oz, which brings the young girl to a fantastical world portrayed not in the sepia tones depicting all of the movie's Kansas scenes, but instead in bright, vivid color. For all of its wonder, however, this new world is a dangerous place, with belligerent, apple-throwing trees and other unfriendlies lurking in the shadows. In Baum's novels, in fact, she and the companions she will soon acquire are nearly devoured by Kalidahs, carnivorous creatures with the heads of tigers and the bodies of bears (oh, my!).

Earlier in the film, Luke and his uncle had traded with a band of Jawas, diminutive desert denizens with high-pitched voices and cute costumes, whose silly antics, mannerisms, and walking style provide a source of amusement.[26] In selling the droids to Owen, the Jawas, in essence, put Luke on the path to fulfilling his calling.

Dorothy, meanwhile, arrives in Munchkinland, a city inhabited by hundreds of petite people called Munchkins, whose colorful garb, high-pitched voices, and tendency to dance and skip make them eminently entertaining to watch.[27] Their purpose: to usher Dorothy to the yellow-brick road that will enable her to take her journey.

The Companions

During Luke's adventure, he and Ben are joined by several fellow travelers. Among them is Han Solo, a Corellian smuggler and a bit of a goofball, whom Leia describes, in *The Empire Strikes Back*, as a "scruffy-looking nerf-herder." Han apparently underestimates his own intelligence, as he tells the princess, when their attempt to rescue her from the Death Star goes awry, that Luke is "the brains" of the operation, not him. Han Solo sees himself as a hired gun, not a thinking man, and agrees to help Luke because of the promise of a monetary reward for his efforts.

The similarities between Dorothy Gale (Judy Garland) and Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and their respective films are numerous.

Dorothy, too, makes several new friends while following the yellow-brick road. The first of these is the Scarecrow, a goofy stuffed man built for, as his name implies, scaring crows (a task that may or may not be similar to herding nerfs). The Scarecrow considers himself not very bright, however, since those who built him neglected to give him a brain. Dorothy invites the scruffy-looking effigy to travel with her to Emerald City, in the hope that the Wizard might reward him with intelligence.

In addition, Luke brings along the droids. Artoo-Detoo remains his faithful sidekick, while C-3PO, a human-styled automaton, is programmed to be fussy, high-strung, touchy, pedantic, and prone to hysterical fits, showing more emotional range than a being of metal would typically exhibit. Early in the film, he suffers from dust contamination due to

exposure to the elements, making it difficult for him to move his joints. This problem is alleviated when Luke provides him with a soothing oil bath. The droid is often frustrated that humans treat him as though he were beneath them, simply because he is non-organic, and he is disappointed in *The Phantom Menace* when his maker, Anakin, forgets to give him an outer casing before departing Tatooine.

The second individual whom Dorothy and her sidekick Toto encounter on the road is the Tin Woodman, a being made entirely of metal who is surprisingly sensitive for someone of a mechanical nature, and often prone to crying. When Dorothy and the Scarecrow find him, the Tin Woodman's joints are highly rusted due to his having been drenched during a rainstorm, and he is thus unable to move until his new friends fix the problem via the generous application of oil around his body. The Woodman is often viewed as less than human due to his metal form, and laments the fact that his creator forgot to give him a heart – an oversight that he hopes the Wizard will rectify.

Han Solo's best friend, Chewbacca, also joins Luke's motley band. The massive, furry Wookiee is intimidating to behold and frequently growls warnings to others if they annoy or threaten him – which few would ever do, of course. But underneath that fearsome exterior is a gentle, cuddly giant who shows great empathy for others and even, during the rescue of Leia, seems a bit afraid of the dianoga in the Death Star's trash compactor, causing Han to call him a "big coward."

The Cowardly Lion, Dorothy's third and final new traveling companion, roars loudly and often so that others will tremble in fear at the mere sight of the king of the forest, and thus never recognize that beneath his fierce bravado, the Lion is terrified. Despite his size and species, the Cowardly Lion is sensitive, emotional, and prissy, and (in keeping with his name) is easily frightened by even the slightest threat. (His portrayal as a campy lion-man, incidentally, is an MGM deviation. He is certainly fearful and sensitive in Baum's novel, but he is also an actual lion, albeit a talking one, who is loyal, noble, and even a bit courageous – a far cry from the simpering sissy of the movie, and closer to the Chewbacca character.) His hope: that the Wizard will grant him some nerve so that other animals will respect him more. The Lion wishes he could be royalty, and thinks that getting more courage will make him a king.

By movie's end, Luke's companions grow as individuals, beyond their self-imposed limitations. Han Solo learns that there is more to him than money. He displays loyalty and integrity, and (in the sequels) strategizes and leads Rebel missions as a general, proving that he is far cleverer than he gives himself credit for. See-Threepio, meanwhile, despite being mechanical, shows himself to be the heart of the group, expressing warmth and friendship for Luke and, especially, for Artoo. And Chewie puts aside his years as a smuggler's partner, guilting Han into returning to the Death Star fray, where the Corellian redeems himself by knocking Darth Vader out of the trench battle and thereby saving Luke and the Rebellion.

As for Dorothy's comrades, they each learn a valuable lesson as well, thanks to the Wizard. The Scarecrow comes to see that even without a brain, he has more wisdom and common sense than he ever realized. The Tin Woodman discovers that a heart is just an organ, and that he has always been the group's heart, regardless of his physical makeup. And the Lion, when push comes to shove, musters the courage to spring into action and save his friends from the Wicked Witch.

Of course, not every character is a perfect parallel 100 percent of the time. There are a few instances in which characters' traits are either transposed and transmogrified to fit a new model, or are split between two individuals, instead of maintaining a direct one-to-one correlation.

The Cowardly Lion shares certain elements of both Chewbacca's and C-3PO's personalities, for instance, while Han takes on an aspect of the Lion, commenting on his own lack of royalty and wondering if a woman like Leia could ever go for a guy like him.[28] And since C-3PO is a protocol droid, it would be illogical for him to take on the Tin Woodman's courage, which is thus given to Chewie, who in turn lends most of his Lion-esque cowardice to the droid. Chewie also assumes the Woodman's role as a conscience for Han, with his great heart balancing his fellow smuggler's brain, whereas faithful Artoo's bravery counterbalance's Threepio's fearful fretting.

In Baum's novels, the Woodman's backstory (fully revealed in *The Tin Woodman of Oz*) is a bit different than on film, as he was originally a flesh-and-blood man named Nick Chopper, whose body parts were lobbed off thanks to the Wicked Witch enchanting his axe to repeatedly dismember him (though one wonders why he didn't procure a new axe after, oh, the

second or third severing). A tinsmith called Ku-Klip then replaced his limbs, one prosthetic piece at a time, casting Ku-Klip in the role of the Tin Woodman's maker, analogous to Anakin being Threepio's maker. He lacks a heart in the book not because a creator forgot to give him one, but simply because he no longer needs one, which tragically leaves him unable to feel the love he once had for his fiancée. The obvious parallel in *Star Wars* involves not C-3PO but rather Anakin himself, who becomes "more machine than man" after Emperor Palpatine transforms him into a prosthetic-limbed cyborg (Darth Vader) following the death of Anakin's beloved wife, Padmé Amidala.

The anomaly is Princess Leia, as Dorothy has her qualities split between brother and sister. Leia receives Dorothy's gender, spunkiness, idealism, and natural leadership skills, whereas Luke shares the young girl's sense of wonderment and adventure, her childhood on the farm, and her ability to engender immediate trust in others.

R2-D2 doesn't really change much in the course of the movie – but, then, he's arguably the most heroic and knowledgeable of the bunch to begin with, and doesn't need to learn a lesson or transcend since he's already enlightened. What is more significant is this: because the twins, Leia and Luke, are both aspects of Dorothy, Artoo's decision to run away from the moisture farm serves to bring the long-separated siblings back together – in essence, making Dorothy whole again.

The Bad Witches

Ever present on Luke's journey is the danger represented by Darth Vader, the Dark Lord of the Sith, a practitioner of dark magic clad from head to toe in a black cloak and helmet, from whom Obi-Wan has long protected Luke. The Empire he serves has oppressed and enslaved the galaxy for decades. Vader brandishes a lightsaber, speaks in a menacing voice punctuated by raspy breathing, and is determined to find the pair of droids within which he believes are stored plans to a powerful space station called the Death Star, which were stolen from the Empire by Rebel forces.

Dorothy's house, upon crashing in Munchkinland, lands on and kills the Wicked Witch of the East (who, in the novel, has held the Munchkins in bondage for years). Her sister, the Wicked Witch of the West (the ruler of

the Winkies, according to the book), vows revenge, but cannot outright kill her since Dorothy is protected by Glinda. The western Witch wears a body-length black cloak and hat, flies on a broomstick that doubles as a weapon able to emit fireballs, speaks in a shrill voice punctuated by loud cackling, and is obsessed with regaining her sister's pair of ruby slippers[29], which she feels Dorothy has stolen from her, and which can bestow upon her great power.

Physically deformed and pale beneath his armor (though he once looked like teen heartthrob Hayden Christensen), Vader will stop at nothing, including torture and murder, to achieve his goals. In each film, his scenes are typically accompanied by variations on a leitmotif, a symphonic theme called "The Imperial March," composed by John Williams for *The Empire Strikes Back*'s soundtrack. Vader has an unending supply of minions in the form of stormtroopers and TIE fighter pilots, who do whatever they are ordered to do, such as flying spacecraft.

Hideous and green-skinned (though she once had the gorgeous face of Mila Kunis[30]), the Wicked Witch is equally comfortable with killing and torturing her enemies in order to satisfy her own needs. On-screen appearances by the Witch (or her non-dream counterpart, Almira Gulch) are usually heralded by a seven-note riff called "Miss Gulch's/Witch's Theme," composed by Herbert Stothart for the soundtrack to *The Wizard of Oz*. Serving the Witch as loyal minions are a legion of winged monkeys (as well as bees, crows, and wolves in the novel).

Obi-Wan allows Vader, his former apprentice, to strike him down so that Luke and his new friends can escape the Death Star and complete their mission for the Rebellion. When this happens, Kenobi's body vanishes, leaving Luke feeling vulnerable and afraid. However, Obi-Wan has not abandoned the teen, for he has merged with the Force and has thus become even more powerful. Thereafter, he continues to guide Luke from the afterlife, appearing to him on Hoth and Dagobah, and providing advice when needed.

Glinda vanishes after warding off the Wicked Witch's attempt to attack Dorothy in Munchkinland, leaving the young girl to embark on her journey alone. But Glinda's protection does not stop there, as she continues to watch over Dorothy and her new friends, using magic to save them, for instance, when they succumb to the Witch's sleeping spell in a field of poppies.

(Later in the film, incidentally, the Wicked Witch also vanishes upon dying.)

The Journey Resumes

Arriving at Alderaan, Luke and company discover that the planet has been destroyed and lose their mobility, as the Death Star ensnares the *Millennium Falcon* in a tractor beam that pulls the ship inside the space station. However, Ben uses the Force to distract two guards so he can shut down the beam. Luke and Han rescue Leia from her cell by overpowering stormtroopers and wearing their uniforms. The armor, however, is too small for Chewie to wear.

Likewise, Dorothy's travels to Emerald City are forestalled when her group falls into a deep sleep after the Wicked Witch drugs them in the poppy field. However, they eventually regain their mobility thanks to Glinda, who uses magic snow to awaken them from their slumber. At a later point in the film, Dorothy's friends rescue her from the Witch's castle by overpowering three Winkie guards and wearing their uniforms. The Lion's is ill-fiting, however, and his furry legs stick out the bottom.

The Rebels escape the station and head to a new destination, a colossal temple on Yavin's fourth moon, where they meet up with General Dodonna and deliver the stolen plans so the Rebellion can find a way to destroy the station. Dodonna then assigns them another mission: weakening the Empire's power base by destroying the Death Star.

After leaving the poppy field, Dorothy's group continues on to their destination, the Wizard's massive castle at the end of the yellow-brick road, where they meet the Wizard and seek his wisdom. The Wizard agrees to help, but only if they complete a mission for him: crippling the Wicked Witch's power base by stealing her broomstick.

To destroy the Death Star, the Rebel pilots must traverse a long (though not yellow) trench along its exterior, leading to a thermal exhaust port. The battle at Yavin IV goes badly for them, with nearly all of Red Squadron, including Luke's childhood friend Biggs, shot down. As the battle ensues, both the Imperial and Rebel crews count down the minutes remaining until the Death Star's deadly laser can destroy the moon. Faithful R2-D2 accompanies Luke in his X-wing, and is critically injured during the

dogfight. Only Han's willingness to put aside his instinct for self-preservation and render assistance keeps the battle from being a total loss.

Things fare equally poorly for Dorothy's friends, with winged monkeys capturing Dorothy and Toto as they traverse the yellow-brick road, ripping the Scarecrow to shreds.[31] The Witch turns over a large timepiece, giving Dorothy a time limit in which to hand over the ruby slippers or die. Loyal Toto (literally, a dog in the fight) escapes from the castle, risking injury to fetch others to help her. Luckily, the Cowardly Lion manages to set aside his innate fright to come to the aid of his friends.

Just when it looks like the Empire will win the battle, Darth Vader is accidentally defeated when Han Solo shoots the Sith Lord's wingman, causing Vader's TIE fighter to spin away from the station uncontrollably. Luke is only able to destroy the station once Ben urges him to have faith by turning off his targeting computer and trusting in the Force. Ben reassures him that "The Force will be with [him] always," awakening Luke's connection to that mystical energy. The Rebels at Yavin IV later celebrate the Death Star's destruction.

At the Wicked Witch's castle, all hope seems lost until the Witch is accidentally killed when Dorothy throws a bucket of water to douse a fire burning the Scarecrow, causing the Witch to melt away and vanish. The elated masses, including the Witch's own minions, sing in celebration that (ding-dong!) the Witch is dead. Dorothy later returns to Kansas, after Glinda tells her to have faith by chanting "There's no place like home" (and, of course, by waking up).

Thanks to the actions of Luke, Leia, and their comrades, the galaxy takes its first major step toward freedom from the evil Galactic Empire. Our heroes (except for Chewbacca, oddly enough, without whom Han might never have saved the day, making Chewie the most unappreciated hero of the battle) receives a symbolic medal for their efforts.[32]

And thanks to the actions of Dorothy and her companions, Oz is finally free from the Wicked Witch's bullying and oppression. The Wizard bestows a symbolic gift upon each of her friends, showing the Lion more gratitude than the Wookiee-snubbing Rebels afforded Chewie.

Although Vader is not destroyed like the Wicked Witches are, another Imperial character is: Grand Moff Tarkin. His motto of rule by fear is also manifest in the way the witches rule their domains, and it is interesting to

note that both he and the Wicked Witch of the West die due to their hubris in underestimating their adversaries.

The Men Behind the Curtains

Despite references to Emperor Palpatine throughout the original *Star Wars* trilogy[33], he never appears in the first movie. Instead, Vader and Tarkin represent the Imperial might in his name. From the standpoint of that first film, the Emperor is purely a symbol, an enigma, about whom we know nothing other than his being an all-powerful dictator. When we finally get our first glimpse of Palpatine, in *The Empire Strikes Back*, it is merely as a glowing, blue, holographic projection of a distorted, human-like head (created by compositing the face of a cowled human actress with the eyes of a chimpanzee), communicating with Vader from across a great distance.

Similarly, despite several references to the mysterious Wizard throughout *The Wizard of Oz*, we come to learn that no one ever actually sees the Great Oz. Instead, others do his bidding, while he remains isolated from his constituents. When we eventually do meet him, he first appears as a glowing, green, disembodied head (which looks only vaguely human, given its bulbous forehead), projected from across the room.[34]

In the *Star Wars* prequels, we witness Palpatine's rise to power, during which he puts up a false front most of the time, posing as a humble, benevolent senator from the peaceful world of Naboo. But the man behind the metaphorical curtain of politics is quite different. As Senator Palpatine, he walks among the populace, who are clueless as to his true identity. But as Darth Sidious, Dark Lord of the Sith, he discreetly manipulates the Trade Federation, the Senate, the Jedi Order, Queen Amidala, Jar Jar Binks, the Separatists, Count Dooku, his own advisors, the clone army, Anakin, and pretty much everyone else around into making him the galactic ruler. Once he has what he wants, he ascends to the throne, abandoning all who helped to put him there and the promises he made in return for their assistance.

The Wizard also puts on a false face, projecting a fearsome, *Star Trek* Balok-like alter-ego persona from behind a literal curtain so that none will realize he is really just a bumbling humbug from Kansas. In fact, he might be putting on *several* false faces, as actor Frank Morgan, in addition to Professor Marvel and the Wizard, also portrays Emerald City's doorman,

the gate guard at the Wizard's castle, and the coachman whose transport is drawn by the Horse of a Different Color, possibly indicating that the Wizard walks unnoticed among the population by donning other personas. By making Dorothy and her friends fear him, the Wizard manipulates them into weakening the Wicked Witch for him. Though certainly not evil like Palpatine, he unscrupulously uses them to get what he wants, then ascends to the heavens in a hot-air balloon so he can return home, leaving Dorothy behind despite his promise to take her with him.

The Wizard is even more duplicitous in Baum's novel, by the way. Unlike the film, in which he meets with Dorothy's friends all at once, he sees them individually in the book, appearing to each as a different being entirely.

Off to See the Wizard: The Hero's Journey

Of course, the many parallels cited above in no way lessen the brilliance of the universe that Lucas created. Many attribute the similarities between *Star Wars*, the Oz mythos, and other epic stories to the notion that Lucas adhered to patterns described in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which form the basis of countless narratives, both literary and filmed (according to Campbell, at least – not everyone subscribes to the theory, and a good deal of stretching and rationalizing is required to make some tales fit his rather over-simplified, paint-by-numbers template... your mileage may vary).

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, his seminal work of comparative mythology, Campbell outlined his theory of the journey undertaken by the archetypal hero in drama, myths, and storytelling around the globe, noting that mythologies that have survived for millennia tend to share a fundamental structure that he dubbed the "monomyth." In his introduction to the book, Campbell summarized his concept:

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

In laying the groundwork for his concept of the monomyth, Campbell outlined a series of 17 stages along the hero's journey. The strong parallels between the *Star Wars* and Oz mythos could be attributed to both adhering to the template of this journey. But do *Star Wars* and *The Wizard of Oz* truly

both fit the template? To some extent, yes, though not for every step of the template, and not necessarily in Campbell's established order.

1. Call to Adventure – the hero exists in mundane normality until receiving information that sends him or her off into the unknown: Luke, on Tatooine, and Dorothy, in Kansas, are each alienated and bored in their dull farm life. Luke discovers a message hidden within R2-D2, which sets him on the path to meeting Ben Kenobi, rescuing Princess Leia, and becoming a Rebel hero and Jedi Knight. Dorothy is swept up in a cyclone and sent to the Land of Oz, where she is called upon to free the masses from the Wicked Witch of the West.

2. Refusal of the Call – upon receiving a call to action, the future hero resists out of a sense of duty, inadequacy, insecurity, fear, or some other reason preventing him or her from moving beyond present circumstances: Luke initially declines Obi-Wan's request to accompany him to Alderaan, out of an obligation to pitch in during his family's upcoming harvest season. Dorothy, after running away from the farm, decides to return home after a chance meeting with Professor Marvel convinces her not to abandon her aunt and uncle. She never actually *refuses* the call, though, since her true call to action doesn't occur until she is already in Oz, happening totally by virtue of her being at the right place at the right time. And even when the Wizard burdens her with what is essentially killing the Wicked Witch, she never turns away from the task.

3. Supernatural Aid – after committing to the quest, the hero encounters a guide and magical helper (a mentor), who often presents the hero with an artifact or talisman: Obi-Wan Kenobi, a former Jedi Master, rescues Luke after the Sandpeople ambush him in the desert, gives the teen his father's lightsaber, and teaches him about the Force. Following Kenobi's death, Yoda assumes this role in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Glinda, a Good Witch, comes to Dorothy's assistance after her house crashes in Munchkinland, gifting her with a pair of magical ruby slippers.

4. Crossing of the First Threshold – at some point, the hero enters the field of adventure, leaving the known limits of the ordinary world behind to venture into a dangerous, unknown realm in which the normal rules no longer apply: After Imperial troops kill Luke's aunt and uncle, he agrees to leave Tatooine with Obi-Wan, beginning with a stop at Mos Eisley. Dorothy

finally leaves the farm when a storm carries her off to Oz, stepping out of the sepia tones of her Kansas home into the colorized world of fantasy.

5. The Belly of the Whale – upon entering this stage, which represents the hero's separation from the known world, he or she prepares to undergo a metamorphosis: Luke's group are "swallowed" by a metaphorical whale when the *Millennium Falcon* is pulled into the massive Death Star, where they then enter a secondary whale by becoming trapped in the station's trash compactor, in which Luke appears to die from drowning. Dorothy's friends not only enter the Wizard's awe-inspiring castle, but are later captured by the Witch's minions and taken into her scary abode as well.

6. The Road of Trials – the hero endures tasks or tests that must be overcome before he or she can begin the transformation, sometimes failing one or more such ordeals: Luke must train in the use of a lightsaber, find Leia's cell aboard the labyrinthine space station, and escape with his friends. Dorothy faces several challenges, such as deciding which path of the yellow-brick road to take, freeing the Scarecrow from his post, oiling the Tin Woodman's joints, and soothing the blustering Cowardly Lion, though these might not truly qualify as trials in Campbell's sense; even traversing a field of drugged poppies isn't trial-like since she has no idea it's a trap before she enters it. Rather, it is her friends who face the trials for her, with Dorothy remaining largely a spectator (in the novel, she is a far more proactive character).

7. Meeting with the Goddess – the hero experiences love, frequently the type of unconditional love shared between mother and infant: For Luke, this occurs when he meets Leia in the Death Star's detention center. This is complicated by the rather awkward revelation, in *Return of the Jedi*, that the two are actually twin siblings, after which Luke ceases to exhibit romantic feelings, instead expressing the love of a brother for his sister. Dorothy literally meets a goddess-like character in Glinda, who provides her with the means to survive her journey (the ruby slippers).

8. Woman as Temptress – the hero faces temptations, typically of a physical nature (and not necessarily involving an actual woman), that threaten to make him or her stray from the quest: This step does not correlate well with the first *Star Wars* film, though Vader attempts to metaphorically seduce Luke to the dark side of the Force in *The Empire Strikes Back*. As for *The Wizard of Oz*, there's not really a temptress

scenario; the poppies make her fall sleep, but they have no evil intent and don't actively do anything tempting or seductive. They're just flowers doing the passive things flowers do (that being said, since poppies are the base for making opium, morphine, and heroin, the case could be made that Dorothy *et. al.* face a narcotic temptation).

It should be noted that categories seven and eight arguably have more to do with Campbell's own sexist, patriarchal views than they do with myths, as they perpetuate the notion of a woman as either a goddess or a whore. In *Star Wars*, Leia is neither, but rather a fully actualized woman with strengths and flaws. Similarly, in *The Wizard of Oz*, while Glinda can be seen in the goddess role, the Wicked Witch is far from a temptress, playing a more traditionally "masculine" role as a dominator who expects her will to be obeyed.

9. Atonement with the Father – at the center-point of the journey, the hero confronts someone who holds power in that person's life, usually a father figure or actual father (though not always a male entity) who wields power over life and death: For *Star Wars*, this one clearly relates to *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, in which Luke discovers that Vader is his father and vows to bring him back from the dark side. In Dorothy's case, clashing with the Wicked Witch allows her to confront her feelings regarding Gulch, while her meetings with the Wizard enable her to understand that he is not nearly as "great and powerful" as he pretends to be.

10. Apotheosis – the hero endures death, either physically or spiritually, then is elevated to a state of divine knowledge: This one is a bit of a stretch for both *Star Wars* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Luke's attainment of Jedi Knight status in *Return of the Jedi* qualifies as elevation, as he transcends the gap between student-hopeful and adept, and is now able to defeat his enemies through the divine power of the Force. But no spiritual death occurs to bring him to that point. Both Obi-Wan and Yoda, on the other hand, do endure actual death and become one with the Force, though they are not the central heroes.

Dorothy becomes elevated when she moves past her fear of the Wicked Witch to save the Scarecrow's life. In so doing, she inadvertently kills the Witch, retaining her good virtue despite committing an act of accidental homicide. Again, though, no spiritual death occurs. The trash-compactor

and poppy-field scenes would count as spiritual death scenes, but neither Luke nor Dorothy emerges any wiser as a result. One *could* argue that Dorothy's spirits are crushed when the Wizard leaves Oz without her and emerges wiser when she learns that she had the power to return home the entire time, but that may stretch things beyond Campbell's meaning.

11. The Ultimate Boon – the hero achieves the goal of his or her quest, attaining something transcendent or beneficial: Luke destroys the Death Star, and in so doing takes a great stride toward mastering his use of the Force, leading to a second, larger boon in *Return of the Jedi*, when he helps to bring about Palpatine's death. For their efforts, the star warriors (minus poor Chewie) receive medals from the Rebellion. Dorothy, likewise, destroys the Wicked Witch, earning the admiration of everyone in Oz. In gratitude, the Wizard bestows symbolic (and, truthfully, rather useless) gifts upon her group.

12. Refusal of the Return – having discovered enlightenment or bliss, the hero must head back to the ordinary world to bestow that boon onto others, though he or she may dread returning to that prior existence: After rescuing Leia from her cell, Luke hesitates in boarding the *Millennium Falcon*, preferring to remain and avenge Ben's death, even though doing so would likely endanger the Rebellion's survival and result in his death. However, he does not return home to Tatooine to do this, so the example falters. For Dorothy, this stage simply doesn't apply; there is, after all, no place like home.

13. The Magic Flight – the hero must escape with the boon, which could prove as dangerous an adventure as the journey to acquire it in the first place: Once Luke and company board the *Falcon*, they must fly the ship out of the Death Star, evade a squad of TIE fighters, and escort Leia to Yavin IV in order to deliver the stolen plans. Dorothy, meanwhile, prepares to return to Kansas with the Wizard aboard his hot-air balloon. In the latter case, the flight is thwarted when he inadvertently – due to Toto's interference – leaves without her. It's not a *magic* flight, though; the balloon is a mundane hot-air balloon (which raises the question of why the Wizard thinks he can return home without either magic or the cyclone that brought him there).

14. Rescue from Without – powerful guides and rescuers help bring the hero back to everyday life, particularly if he or she has been weakened or

wounded: The *Falcon* shows up in the final moments of the Death Star trench battle to save Luke from death (such last-minute rescue scenarios occur throughout the *Star Wars* films, in fact). And Glinda steps in as the Wizard's balloon takes flight, instructing Dorothy on how she can get home by a much simpler method (which would have been very helpful knowledge back when, oh, she was still in Munchkinland).

15. Crossing of the Return Threshold – the hero, in resuming normality, faces the challenge of retaining, integrating, and sharing the wisdom gained in the course of the journey: One possible candidate in *Star Wars* is when the *Falcon* destroys pursuing TIE fighters while breaking away from the Death Star. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy experiences this moment upon awakening back in Kansas, to find that her adventures in Oz were merely a dream (again, in the movie only), and that her comrades in Oz were based on individuals she knows in the waking world.

16. Master of the Two Worlds – the hero becomes detached from prior limitations and ambitions, achieves a balance between the spiritual and physical planes, and is able to move from light to darkness and back again: Luke reaches this point during the trench battle, when he gives himself over to the Force, enabling him to destroy the Death Star without using his targeting computer. Later, in *Return of the Jedi*, he (with help from his redeemed father) restores balance to the light and dark sides of the Force by eliminating the Emperor. As for Dorothy, it happens when she rises above her fears and stands up to the Wicked Witch (and, by proxy, to Gulch).

17. Freedom to Live – finally, mastery on the part of the hero frees him or her from a fear of dying, granting the freedom to live in the moment, no longer fettered by future anticipations or past regrets: In the final moments of *A New Hope*, *Return of the Jedi*, and *The Phantom Menace*, the heroes celebrate their newly attained freedom with grand ceremonies. The death of the Wicked Witch becomes an immediate cause of celebration in Oz as well. That being said, the type of freedom Campbell describes is more internal, and Luke only begins to exhibit such freedom at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, after he cremates his redeemed father and is reunited with his friends. As for Dorothy, this step simply does not apply. In fact, in the 1985 film sequel *Return to Oz*, she is still troubled by Henry's and Em's inability to believe her.[35]

Because of the Wonderful Things He Does

In examining the evidence, one thing becomes abundantly clear: whether intentionally or not, George Lucas, in creating the amazing *Star Wars* mythos, crafted a story that bears a remarkable similarity to L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its MGM film adaptation, in terms of characters, plot points, visuals, and thematic devices. That should in no way lessen a fan's enjoyment of either franchise, of course, for if one accepts Joseph Campbell's premise, then both stories would naturally adhere to his monomyth template.

A few more things to consider:

Lucas's close friend Steven Spielberg, in directing *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, created a film that is, essentially, *The Wizard of Oz* in reverse. As noted by *The Hollywood Reporter*, "A 3-foot-tall munchkin lands on Earth, where he's befriended by a trio of locals (and their little dog) who help him phone to no-place-like-home until, at the end, where does E.T. go in his spaceship? That's right – over the rainbow."[36] A child wearing a Yoda Halloween costume appears in that movie, and several members of E.T.'s species show up in *The Phantom Menace*, occupying a balcony during the Senate scenes. Author James Luceno, in his *Star Wars* novel *Cloak of Deception*, carried this in-joke a step further by naming their senator Grebleips (Spielberg spelled backwards).

George Lucas talks with Fairuza Balk (Dorothy Gale) on the set of *Return to Oz*.

A popular topic among fans of *The Wizard of Oz* and the music of Pink Floyd is the idea that synchronicity exists between the film's visuals and the band's 1973 album *The Dark Side of the Moon*. If one turns off the soundtrack and instead lets the album accompany the film, there are several instances when the songs' lyrics and music correspond very closely with what is happening in the movie. Pink Floyd and those involved in making the album have dismissed such a relationship as a forced (Forced?) coincidence. The popular name attributed to this phenomenon? "Dark Side of the Rainbow"[37]... which would have made a passable alternate title for this essay.

The Empire Strikes Back's movie poster, in which Han romantically tilts Leia back in his arms, pays clear homage to an iconic poster advertising the film *Gone with the Wind*, on which Rhett Butler holds Scarlett O'Hara in a very similar pose. Not only did *Gone with the Wind* hit theaters in the same year as *The Wizard of Oz*, but both films were directed by the very same individual: Victor Fleming.

Finally (and perhaps most telling), in 1985, Walter Murch directed the aforementioned film *Return to Oz*, based on Baum's novels *The Marvelous*

Land of Oz and *Ozma of Oz*, which served as a direct sequel to the MGM classic. When Murch was nearly fired, several high-profile producers interceded on his behalf, George Lucas among them, earning a “Special Thanks” in the credits. Gary Kurtz, who had produced *American Graffiti*, *Star Wars*, and *The Empire Strikes Back*, served as an uncredited producer on *Return to Oz*, further cementing the Lucas/Oz connection.[38]

Is this all just a coincidence? Is the idea of *Star Wars* directly tying to *The Wizard of Oz* too out there to merit consideration? Perhaps. But wouldn’t it be wonderful if one could travel a long time ago, to a galaxy far, far away, somewhere over the rainbow, where troubles melt like lemon drops away above the chimney tops, where the Force is with you always, binding the galaxy together, and where the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true?

That’s where you’ll find me.

Thanks to Oz expert Joseph Bongiorno[39] *for his invaluable assistance.*

How *Star Wars* Broke Cinema

by Julian Darius

The influence of *Star Wars* (1977), and the original trilogy more generally, on American cinema can hardly be exaggerated. Some of this influence is good, but some of it is decidedly not. In fact, it's not going too far to say that *Star Wars* broke cinema.

But first, let's discuss more positive aspects of the movie's influence.

More than any other film, *Star Wars* led to an astounding surge in science fiction. Indeed, it's amazing to think of how many science-fiction franchises were either created or revived in the wake of *Star Wars*. Most prominently, plans for a TV revival of *Star Trek* were scrapped, in favor of bigger box-office returns, leading that franchise to be revived instead as 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. This, in turn, led to more cinematic sequels than there were *Star Wars* films, not to mention multiple TV series.

The original *Battlestar Galactica* was launched in 1978; comparisons to *Star Wars* were immediate, even resulting in a lawsuit. While the show only ran for one season, followed by a one-season successor (*Galactica 1980*), the franchise was relaunched in 2003 on cable TV to much greater success (and influence).

Of course, not all imitators of *Star Wars* were so successful. Disney tried its hand with 1979's *The Black Hole*, which debuted with a heavy wave of merchandise modeled after *Star Wars* but failed to spawn a franchise. After decades of occasionally trying (and largely failing) to create a boys' franchise to rival the company's animated princesses, Disney purchased Marvel in 2009 and, in 2012 (following big-budget disappointments with 2010's *Tron: Legacy* and 2012's *John Carter*), bought Lucasfilm itself.

The science-fiction serial roots of *Star Wars* helped spur TV to revive *Buck Rogers* in 1978, with *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* running for two seasons. Similarly, *Flash Gordon* was revived as the cult-classic 1980 film. A slew of other projects have been attributed to the success of *Star Wars*, including a Japanese *Star Wars* rip-off titled *Message from Space* (1978), which even has a character named Han in it; the TV series *Jason of Star Command* (1978-1981); the Italian film *Starcrash* (1979); the low-budget movie *Battle Beyond the Stars* (1980); *Krull* (1983); and *The Last Starfighter* (1984).

Film historians sometimes point to a trio of films, rather than just *Star Wars*, for the sudden spurt of science fiction. But *Star Wars* came first and was the most commercially successful. Indeed, comparing it with the other two films reveals much about the real influence of *Star Wars*.

The first of these two other films is Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which premiered later in 1977. John Williams scored both it and *Star Wars*, and special effects artist Dennis Muren also worked on both. In fact, Muren deliberately styled the alien ships in *Close Encounters* to have a different look than the technology of *Star Wars*, and incorporated a small R2-D2 model into the mothership seen at the end of *Close Encounters*. Of course, *Close Encounters* is a more traditional sci-fi movie, with an emphasis on character and encountering otherness, whereas *Star Wars* is really a science-*fantasy* romp. *Close Encounters* didn't premiere in the summer; *Star Wars* did. Unlike *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters* wasn't part of a storm of merchandising, and it similarly didn't spawn a franchise. While the influences of any movie are vast, movies like *Contact* (1997) and *Interstellar* (2014) fall on the *Close Encounters* side of this division, while action romps like *Independence Day* (1996) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) fall more clearly on the *Star Wars* side.

The other movie cited by film historians as spurring science fiction is 1978's *Superman*. Although it was released a year later, production on *Superman* was already underway when *Star Wars* hit theaters. In fact, George Lucas reportedly turned down an offer to direct the film because he was working on *Star Wars*. Compared to any other super-hero movie before or since, *Superman* takes pains to ground itself in the science-fiction genre, in large part to legitimize the film's super-hero elements. Thus, despite it

starring a flying man in a cape, *Superman*'s science-fiction elements are true science fiction, not science fantasy. The movie's whole first act occurs on Krypton and, in the best tradition of science fiction, emphasizes how *alien* Krypton is. The worlds in *Star Wars*, despite having fantastic elements, are far less foreign.

Superman may not have owed a lot to *Star Wars*, outside of the earlier film encouraging Warner Bros. and preparing audiences, but *Superman* certainly can't claim to have influenced much sci-fi adventure that followed. Tellingly, the super-hero elements of *Superman* didn't inspire a wave of super-hero movies, and the super-hero moves of the 21st Century owe a lot more to *Star Wars* than to the more traditional science-fiction influences woven through *Superman*.

Film historians also cite *Star Wars*, along with 1975's *Jaws*, as having essentially established the blockbuster model that Hollywood follows today, in which action movies are released to thousands of theaters simultaneously, always during the summer and with heavy advertising. But decades hence, there can be no doubt which of these two movies had the most influence. The legacy of *Jaws* arguably survives in action-based thrillers, but Hollywood's output is now utterly dominated by big-budget, effects-laden movies featuring magical or science-fiction elements. As of this writing, super-heroes dominate, but the slick, action-heavy, effects-heavy style of these movies owes little to *Jaws* and much to *Star Wars*. The same can be said of magical or fantasy-based franchises, like Harry Potter or *Lord of the Rings*. Of course, the blockbuster has evolved considerably since the 1970s, including more than a decade in which *Star Wars* was absent from theaters. But looking back, the *Star Wars* formula has obviously won. In fact, it's been cemented at the center of Hollywood, to the point that it's hard to get other types of movies made and distributed.

This shouldn't be taken as a *wholly* negative development. Sure, it's easy to lament how more artistic or character-driven films get lost in the shuffle of big-budget, mass-market "tentpole" movies, if those smaller endeavors even get a national release at all. But the blockbuster model has flourished because we go to see these movies. Some of them are terrible, but some movies have *always* been terrible. At their best, they're a lot of fun, and they are probably the closest thing we have to shared cultural

moments, in an era of cable TV and streaming video. That was, after all, part of the appeal of the original *Star Wars*: seeing it with friends over popcorn, then talking about it afterwards.

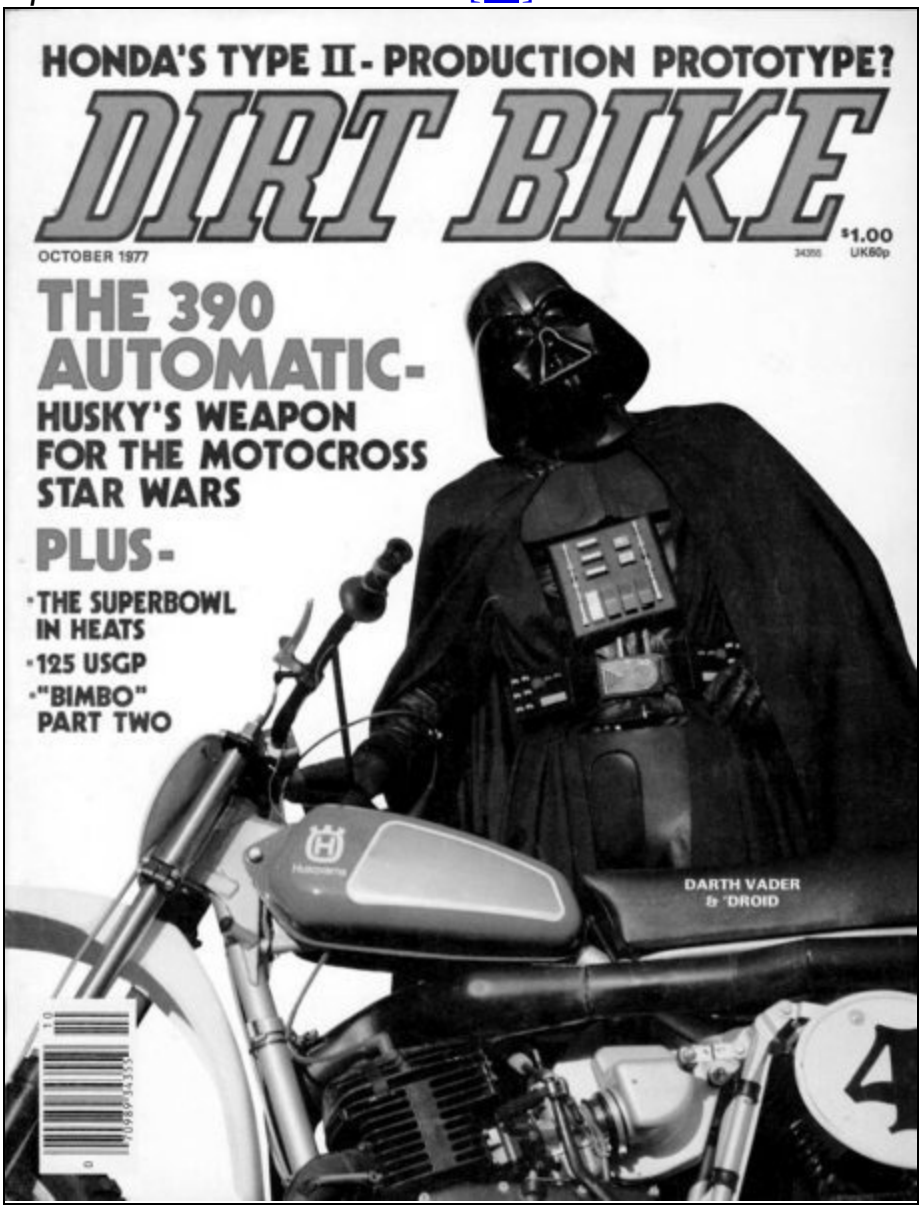
The heavily advertised nature of the original trilogy can't be separated from its merchandising. For *Star Wars*, Lucas negotiated a contract with 20th Century Fox that allowed him to keep merchandising revenues, an area in which Fox had basically given up for a decade.[40] Lucas sold the toy rights to Kenner for $100,000 – two-thirds of Lucas's directing fee.[41] Kenner was initially unable to meet demand (and even sold coupons for toys they couldn't make fast enough), but by 1978 had sold more than $100 million worth of toys.[42] And don't think this merchandising used to be tasteful; actually, brands are far more concerned about appearing tasteful today. For example, after the first film, Darth Vader appeared on the cover of *Dirt Bike* magazine.

Licensing revenue only increased for the sequels and prequels. Indeed, it's not too much to say that *Star Wars* isn't really a set of movies, TV shows, novels, and comics; it would be more accurate to say that *Star Wars* is a brand of merchandise, of which narrative content is a distinctly minority subset. In 2011, *Star Wars* toys reportedly grossed $3 billion in sales,[43] a total that eclipses the box-office results for any movie in history.

Here, too, *Star Wars* has proven profoundly influential. Merchandising revenues sometimes exceed revenues from the movie itself.

Released in November 2013, Disney's animated *Frozen* took in $401 million at U.S. theaters and $873 million abroad, for a total of $1.274 billion, of which Disney only keeps a percentage (which tends to be less abroad). But *Frozen* merchandise sold briskly throughout 2014, with many stores selling out of several items throughout the year and items being sold online for greater than their retail price. By Christmas, Wal-Mart reported stocking 700 different *Frozen* items.[44] In January 2015, this merchandise expanded to include a *Frozen* wedding dress.[45] Disney's own revenues from *Frozen* merchandise almost certainly topped $1 billion in 2014, boosting the company's bottom line and stock price, even while movie revenue remained flat.[46] Overall, Disney merchandise (including *Star*

Wars and Marvel merchandise) generated $40.9 billion in sales in 2013, and that was *before* the boost from *Frozen*.[47]



***Star Wars* has given rise to some rather tasteless merchandise since its inception, as evidenced by this issue of *Dirt Bike Magazine* from Oct 1977.**

Released in May 2014, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* took in a comparatively paltry $203 million domestically and $506 million abroad, for a total of $709 million. It was the weakest performer of the five Spider-Man films to date. Less than a year later, Sony announced that it would be rebooting the franchise. Yet Spider-Man merchandise raked in $1.3 billion in sales in 2013, *without* a major film release.[48] Meanwhile, Marvel has

reportedly been vetoing X-Men merchandise in order to make Fox's X-Men movie franchise less profitable.[49]

Given these numbers, it's not surprising that merchandising concerns are altering the movies themselves. But this, too, goes back to George Lucas and *Star Wars*. Reportedly, an early draft of *Return of the Jedi* had Han Solo die (despite Harrison Ford agreeing to return for a third movie), but Lucas reversed himself at least, in part, because killing off a main character would hurt toy sales. Lucas had also planned to feature Wookiees in *Return of the Jedi* instead of Ewoks, but decided fighting teddy bears would have more kid appeal.[50]

It's certainly easy to condemn this development, and it's a bit silly (and potentially offensive) to think that narrative choices in movies, or even whether a movie gets made, ought to have anything to do with sales of plastic toys. But here, too, we shouldn't pretend that the influence of *Star Wars* is entirely negative. First of all, those *Star Wars* products were *fun*. As kids, my brother and I had most of the *Star Wars* toys, and playing with them aided our imaginative development.[51] And it wasn't only toys: I had an *Empire Strikes Back* blanket that I adored, and Marvel's *Star Wars* comics were among some of the earliest my brother and I read.

Even looking at how *Star Wars* taught the lesson that movies and TV shows had to exist in tandem with toys, the effect of *Star Wars* isn't entirely negative. This effect was especially positive on toy companies, which learned in the 1980s that a successful line required narrative content. As distant as Hasbro's G.I. Joe and Transformers might seem from *Star Wars* in terms of genre, they very much owe their existence to the *Star Wars* merchandising effect and were created almost simultaneously as toy lines, animated TV shows (and later movies), and comic books. Mattel, which had passed on the *Star Wars* toy license in 1976, tried several concepts before hitting on *Masters of the Universe*, a toy line similarly launched with a cartoon show and comics (tiny comics were originally included with the toys themselves). Whatever one thinks of the relative merits of these various series, all remain legitimate franchises to this day and, like many sci-fi franchises, owe a great deal to *Star Wars*.

But perhaps the most influential aspect of *Star Wars* is that it achieved its remarkable success while also being pretty dumb.

Don’t get me wrong, *Star Wars* fans! I’ve already mentioned that I loved the movies as a child. Because my father worked for the American Film Institute, I even got to see the L.A. premiere of *Return of the Jedi* as a kid.[52] I wouldn’t call myself a *Star Wars* fan today, but I don’t dislike *Star Wars*. And *Star Wars* fans are great – my own goddaughter is one. So I’m no *Star Wars* hater. Hell, I’m an American male; *Star Wars* is in my DNA.

But the original trilogy, while it was visually stunning and is filled with cool ideas, is not exactly smart storytelling.

It’s become part of *Star Wars* lore that most people in Hollywood didn’t believe in the movie, and its success surprised them. The movie’s great savior was Alan Ladd, Jr., then president of 20th Century Fox, who believed in the film. But while this story is usually spun as proof of Hollywood not recognizing the genius of Lucas’s vision, the exact opposite is true. Lucas was the celebrated director of *American Graffiti*, and almost no one could imagine or even understand what he was doing. Those who knew details of the story, or had read the script, almost uniformly thought it was dreadful.

Lucas only came up with *Star Wars* because he couldn’t secure the rights to *Flash Gordon*. Several elements of *Star Wars*, right down to the term “Jedi,” came from *John Carter of Mars* and its sequels. Han Solo was originally a green-skinned monster with gills. As late as 1976, the movie was going to be titled *The Adventures of Luke Starkiller as taken from the Journal of the Whills, Saga I: The Star Wars*. Even as filming was about to start, Lucas knew the script was weak, especially in its dialogue, and had Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz do an uncredited rewrite, extensively reworking the dialogue. Lucas still tweaked the script throughout production.

While filming, Lucas faced a cast and crew who didn’t believe in the film. Reportedly, he got very little respect on set, as crew members found the movie unintentionally hilarious and saw it as a children’s film with few redeeming qualities. Several thought the movie would be a failure. In addition, Lucas didn’t get along with cinematographer Gilbert Taylor, who felt that he rarely communicated and was too interfering. The actors reported that the shy Lucas gave them very few notes, except to constantly demand they deliver their lines faster.[53] Lucas also ran over budget.

One of the people who helped keep everyone united was Alec Guinness, whose hiring had given the project instant legitimacy and who was treated as a kind of elder statesman on set. Yet Guinness seems to have done so out of a sense of old-school professionalism, rather than any belief in the material. He took the job for the money and because he liked *American Graffiti*, though he called the script "fairy-tale rubbish." While filming, he wrote "new rubbish dialogue reaches me every other day on wadges of pink paper – and *none* of it makes my character clear or even bearable."[54] Guinness came to regret taking the part, even during production, and was glad his character was killed off.[55] But he also regretted the movie's success. Not long after the film's release, he met a 12-year-old boy who claimed to have seen *Star Wars* 100 times and seemed to venerate the actor. The actor asked the boy never to see *Star Wars* again, and the child burst into tears. Writing about this 20 years later, Guinness wrote, "I just hope the lad, now in his thirties, is not living in a fantasy world of secondhand, childish banalities."[56]

Although *Star Wars* helped establish the summer blockbuster, it was originally scheduled for a Christmas 1976 release. But it was in very poor shape. About a third of the movie had to be removed, including a lengthy opening depicting Luke Skywalker's daily life on Tatooine, which has been described as *American Graffiti* in space. This portion included a friend named Biggs Darklighter who left to join the Rebels. In February 1977, Lucas screened the film, which still had World War II dogfight footage in place of space battles and hand-drawn indicators of laser beams, for a group that included Brian de Palma, Stephen Spielberg, studio executives, and Marvel's Roy Thomas and Howard Chaykin (who were preparing the *Star Wars* comic). Spielberg claims to have been the only one who liked the movie, though studio executives were apparently wildly enthusiastic (perhaps following Alan Ladd, Jr.'s lead). Most seemed confused, by Lucas's own account.[57]

If most of Lucas's cast and crew thought the movie was painfully bad kids' fare, editing and special effects largely fixed the quality problems and made the movie fun to watch. But no one thought the result wasn't a movie for children; contemporary reviews focused on how "innocent," "funny," and "simple" it was. (Roger Ebert used all three quoted words in his review of the first film.[58])

The movie certainly succeeded, in no small part, due to its special effects – and to the brilliant design work of Ralph McQuarrie, who was part of the project before it was greenlighted. But whereas the movie is brilliant visually, it positively eschews logic.

Perhaps nothing more visually epitomizes *Star Wars* than the lightsaber. And without a doubt, it looks cool. Given that *Star Wars* is really science fantasy, or even a fairy tale (as Lucas himself called it), the lightsaber also evokes the idea of an order of knights who use swords. But it makes absolutely no sense. Light continues unless it hits something. So what stops the light from extending outward infinitely from the lightsaber's hilt? If it's a kind of laser with a very limited range, why do lightsabers clash against each other? Moreover, how is this a practical weapon in a world filled with laser guns? An argument could be made that lightsabers might prevent breaches aboard spaceships, but they are used on planets, too. If you think about them, lightsabers don't make any sense at all, on any levels except for the visual and the symbolic. But this doesn't matter, because a sword made out of light is a fun idea and looks cool.

In the same way, the Death Star is instantly emblematic of *Star Wars* but makes no sense. Of course, it's designed with a "fire into this if you want to blow everything up" shaft. And because it was still under construction, it was (as discussed in the 1994 film *Clerks*) presumably filled with construction workers, who were killed along with a crew numbering in the thousands, if not millions. But these well-known criticisms pale in comparison to the basic physics of the Death Star, which is said to be the size of a moon. Even traveling from one side of the Death Star to another should take hours, yet in the movies, everything's conveniently located. That's because the filmmakers like the *idea* of a moon-sized ship, but once they have to envision that ship's interior, they revert to thinking of a conventional-size spaceship or base. Not to mention that the Death Star's reason for being – its planet-destroying gun – could probably be mounted on something a lot smaller than a moon. But none of this matters, because a moon-sized spaceship that can blow up planets is a very cool idea, and it makes for a good visual.

Still, why does the Death Star have a trash compactor that is filled with water and is inhabited by a dangerous giant monster? Water is a precious commodity in outer space. Who would fill a trash compactor with water?

And how did this apparently aquatic monster (known as a dianoga) get inside it? Did a stormtrooper flush a baby dianoga, then think twice and flood the trash compactor to provide the creature with a habitat? But we're not supposed to ask these questions, because being stuck in a flooded trash compactor and fighting a monster while the walls narrow is dramatic, dammit.

What's more, the way in which *Star Wars* deals with space travel makes no sense. Characters zip between planets with no sense of the distance traversed. Of course, *Star Wars* ships can travel faster than light, but not all multiples of light are equal. The same thing occasionally happens in *Star Trek* (the *Enterprise* is at the Neutral Zone one episode, then back at Earth the next), but the entire universe of *Star Trek* is theoretically based on multiples of warp speed and vast unexplored portions of our galaxy. *Star Trek* technical manuals carefully describe the physics involved and include detailed schematics of the various vessels. Online, someone once calculated, given official *Star Wars* maps of its galaxy, that the *Millennium Falcon* can travel at such a high multiple of the speed of light that it should be able to reach a neighboring galaxy in a matter of hours. But this doesn't matter, because space in *Star Wars* is only window dressing; it's a fantasy with spaceships instead of cars, planets instead of cities.

Star Wars is filled with an absurd number of instances of poor storytelling, and they start with the beginning of the movie. Darth Vader intercepts a Rebel ship that has stolen plans for the Death Star, yet his crew doesn't fire on an escape pod because no lifeforms are detected aboard. Of course, this doesn't make sense, because plans could be sent somewhere without a crew, and this universe is teeming with robots. In fact, C-3PO and R2-D2 are in the pod, setting the entire plot into motion – which is why, despite being very concerned about the stolen plans, the Star Destroyer deliberately lets an escape pod get away.

This kind of poor storytelling is rampant in the film. Obi-Wan Kenobi identifies the culprits behind a destroyed sandcrawler because, as he says, "Only Imperial stormtroopers are so precise," yet the stormtroopers' shots are wildly inaccurate whenever the main characters are around. Leia is tortured off-screen by a floating spherical robot, and she witnesses her home planet's destruction, but she shows no trauma from either.[59]

While we're on the subject of Alderaan, its destruction causes Kenobi to utter his famous line, "I felt a great disturbance in the Force." Jedi powers are famously ill-defined, but certainly the psychic emanations of a planet's death couldn't travel faster than light. Leia knows her rescue from the Death Star was too easy, and is suspicious that she's being tracked, yet she has Han fly to the Rebel base on Yavin IV anyway; unsurprisingly, the Death Star follows. Once there, the Death Star waits on the far side of Yavin for the Rebel base on the moon to revolve into view – even though the space station can both move and blow up planets, and blowing up Yavin would surely destroy its moon as well.

Finally, the celebration at the end of *Star Wars* is one of the most abrupt endings in movie history, to the point that it feels tacked-on. There's no reason to touch base with the various characters after their victory, because character (outside of being visual or cool) doesn't really matter here.

Shortly after being tortured and forced to witness her planet's destruction, Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) slings witty rejoinders like nothing happened.

Maybe you think that I'm nitpicking. Yes, most stories have some kind of plot hole, but that doesn't justify the total lack of concern for them in *Star Wars*. And, of course, stories about the fantastic involve suspension of disbelief. But that term refers to an acceptance of a plot's basic principles (e.g. humans are flying around in space, magic exists), and stories still have to follow their own internal logic, which is why the introduction of a device or a spell that defeats the villain in the final act is very bad storytelling in any universe. Suspension of disbelief might get us to accept that you can build a spaceship the size of a moon, but it's abusing the term to use it to

explain away why, having introduced this fun concept, that spaceship then isn't *treated* like it's the size of a moon. Once "It's fantasy!" can be used to justify this kind of narrative weakness, it could also be used to justify Han Solo sprouting angel wings without explanation. And it's a sign of maturity to be able to like or to appreciate something, while also recognizing its flaws.

But on a deeper level, *Star Wars* doesn't simply eschew narrative logic. It's positively anti-intellectual. The Force is a cool, mystical idea, but it's all about shutting off the mind. Luke Skywalker is a country bumpkin who is thrust into a highly technological and bureaucratic interplanetary milieu, in which education is specialized and experts ought to exist. But Luke doesn't have expertise; he has faith in himself, and he's essentially blessed by God. His story parallels fairy tales of people who became great soldiers, despite a lack of training or education in weapons. Luke Skywalker is Sarah Palin, who didn't understand the three branches of the U.S. government but who thought she could shake up the system for the better, due simply to her innate sense of what was right and her belief that God was on her side. He's the embodiment of America's cult of self-esteem, in which we're suspicious of scientists and other experts, and celebrate personal faith over hard work or training.

There is perhaps no better embodiment of this than Luke's skill as a space fighter pilot. Even with our comparatively primitive planes, thousands of hours are required for flight certification. But Luke embarrasses his fellow pilots ("I used to bullseye womp rats in my T-16 back home") and absurdly takes the helm of a ship without any training whatsoever. When he destroys the Death Star, it's because he shuts off his instruments and trusts his instincts instead. Of course, this is *precisely* what real pilots are told *never* to do, because it tends to get them killed. But because this isn't anti-intellectual enough for Lucas, Luke also effectively blindfolds himself. At this point, he clearly *deserves* to die, which would have made the important moral statement that education, training, and expertise matter. Instead, the movie rigs the deck, and Luke not only doesn't crash or get shot down but makes a one-in-a-million shot that blows up the bad guys and saves everyone.

It's not going too far to say that *Star Wars* contains its own counter-criticism against those pointing out its many illogical plot points. When we

point out that something doesn't make sense, the movie puts us in the position of poor Wedge Antilles, who said "That's impossible!" about hitting that silly shaft in the Death Star – and is instantly put in his place by the divinely blessed new recruit who hasn't been through any formalized target practice. And then Luke is proven right, at least within the movie's rigged, anti-intellectual universe, in which the successful good guys are hostile to logical criticism.

To be fair, fairy tales and fiction (especially American fiction) are filled with such characters. American folk heroes, particularly those tied to the Wild West, recall a rough-and-tumble tradition in which someone could supposedly head out to find one's fortune, buoyed only by belief in one's self and a kind of divine luck. The pulpy science-fiction tales that inspired *Star Wars* are filled with similar figures – white Americans who, once transported to an extraterrestrial setting, are somehow able to do what all the extraterrestrials can't. The substitution of alien planets for the Wild West may be seen as a reaction to the colonization of the West and the maturation of the nation, such that education and institutional advancement had come to prohibit the self-reinvention the nation still mythologized. But *Star Wars* takes this tradition of muscle-bound heroes, who triumph through some combination of will and luck, and transforms it into a mystical reality that makes the anti-intellectual strains of its predecessors into something more resembling an anti-intellectual manifesto. In *Star Wars*, anti-intellectualism isn't a trope; it's how the universe works.

Many scholars have made a big deal out of how Luke Skywalker's story parallels Joseph Campbell's heroic journey.[60] And that's true. But you can make almost any tale fit that pattern if you try. (For this reason, Campbell's long been a go-to reference for "scholars" anxiously trying to legitimize popular culture.) The heroic journey is ingrained in Western storytelling, and it's certainly a part of Lucas's inspirations, particularly *Flash Gordon* and *John Carter of Mars*.

The anti-intellectualism woven into *Star Wars* isn't simply an academic or literary issue. The myth that all you need to succeed is self-confidence has since become part of pop psychology; Luke Skywalker is one step away from gimmicks like visualizing success (rather than, say, work) in order to make the universe manifest it. The myth of innate, divine merit, while it has roots in the Protestant idea of the Elect, persists in the concept of the

American Dream. It’s certainly present in the stories that Hollywood stars and corporate executives tell of themselves, which often minimize years or even decades of hard work in favor of narratives that privilege being “discovered,” or minimize the role of luck in favor of the notion that ideas succeed on their own merit.

Indeed, it’s easy to see how Luke Skywalker would have appealed to Lucas, while his cast and crew were mocking him.[61] Some of the best screenwriters, producers, technicians, and actors in the world didn’t think much of him. Yet he persevered, and we may presume he must have had faith in his project, even as he continued to revise it heavily. Sadly, the narrative he wove supposes that he didn’t succeed, in major part, due to luck, or even against himself, but because his faith and his vision were pure. On a certain level, *Star Wars* is about how awesome *Star Wars* is.

Of course, self-confidence is an important trait, especially to teach children. But the Force embodies the idea that this is *all* you need to succeed and that the successful aren’t lucky but are instead innately superior. Luke comes from a privileged family, despite his humble status on Tatooine – he's the son of a queen and a Jedi hero. He’s not actually an everyman figure. And his almost effortless success only makes sense in a fictional, just universe in which people tend to rise or fall to their natural level. Luke Skywalker is a fundamentally conservative figure, as well as an anti-intellectual one. If you’ve failed, if your art didn’t find an audience, or if the American Dream passed you by and you’re not as rich as everyone on TV, it’s because the Force isn’t strong with you. And no amount of thinking can change that; in fact, thinking is explicitly depicted in *Star Wars* as a self-destructive endeavor.

These same problems persist in the sequels. Like *Star Wars*, early drafts of *The Empire Strikes Back* were even sillier than what made it to screen. For example, Darth Vader had a castle, complete with pet gargoyles. Many *Star Wars* fans know that Lucas (despite his occasional statements to the contrary) didn’t always intend Vader to be Luke’s father or Leia his sister, and he probably wouldn’t have had Luke and Leia kiss in *Star Wars* and *Empire* if he had. Drafts of *Star Wars* featured Luke’s father appearing alongside Darth Vader, while drafts of *Empire* brought back Luke’s father, Anakin, and played up the Luke-Leia-Han love triangle.

The Empire Strikes Back is generally remembered as the best of the original trilogy, and has become the go-to example of a sequel being better than its predecessor. I agree that it, but it's still got plenty of the same stupidity.

The exogorth, colloquially known as the "space slug," is a prime example of a plot device in the *Star Wars* universe that makes no logical sense whatsoever.

The example that always sticks in my mind is the worm on the asteroid, known as an exogorth. Han Solo and company have fled in the *Millennium Falcon*, and they head into an asteroid field. It's a conventional sci-fi asteroid field, with the rocks so close together that they're an obstacle to navigation. In real life, asteroids packed this densely would have collided long ago, but that's not the problem I want to discuss. Han and crew hide the ship inside a cavern on an asteroid. Later, Han realizes something, and they flee. "This is no cave," Han says, and they fly out past two rows of teeth just before they can chomp down. As the *Falcon* escapes, the space slug's head reaches out from the hole in the asteroid, barely missing the fleeing ship. It's supposed to be an exciting moment, founded on a mildly cool, childlike idea: "Ha ha, they thought they were in a cave, but they were inside this exotic animal!"

And how is this worm living on this asteroid again?

That's what you'd ask, unless the person proposing this worm wasn't a young child, whom you might want to encourage… and whom you'd trust would figure out how to be more disciplined in his or her ideas before he or she started writing professionally.

The asteroid doesn’t seem to have any air or heat. And other than an occasional mynock, there’s no other life on the asteroid that we can see, which means the exogorth has little in the way of a food source.

You could pretty much stop there, but my particular brain can’t help but wonder about other stuff, like how this worm evolved on a lifeless asteroid, or how it got there if it didn’t. We even see Han and others wearing small masks, suggesting there’s little or no atmosphere on the asteroid or inside the giant slug. But there’s no decompression, nor do they suffer from the cold of outer space. Also, the worm must have had its mouth open the entire time — which might make sense if it evolved to trap its prey this way, like a sarlacc. But why does it keep its mouth open even *after* being shot and showing signs of pain, until the *Falcon* is streaking away, and only *then* shut its mouth too slowly to prevent its prey from leaving? The answer is obviously that this provides the maximum melodrama, and that’s the slug's only real function. You’re not supposed to think about it. Obviously, no one working on the movie did.

The space worm might as well be a fire-breathing dragon. Or a squid. Or a giant human being made of ice. It could be anything. None of these creatures would have any less reason to be there than the exogorth.

The monsters of *Return of the Jedi* function in the same way. What is the rancor? It’s just a giant monster Jabba the Hut keeps for his own amusement. Nothing further is indicated in the film, nor required. That same movie also has the sarlacc, a giant beast of unknown anatomy whose mouth is a toothed and tentacled pit in the desert. How in the world did it get there or evolve? No one asks these questions in the movies, and they’re not supposed to matter. Cool ideas, unfiltered or illogical as they might be, are their own reward in *Star Wars*, which turns out to be less science fiction than surrealism.

The climax of *Return of the Jedi* is infamously illogical. The Empire hasn’t fixed the Death Star's absurd design flaws for its new model, but it has installed a force field. Inexplicably, that force field isn’t internally generated within the space station. Instead, it’s generated from a small and poorly guarded building on the surface of the planet Endor’s Forest Moon. Almost as amazing, the Rebels don’t blast this building from space, but instead send a small party to blow it up, because that leads to easier, entertaining scenes. In the ensuing fight, we learn that stormtroopers’ armor

isn’t only useless against blasters, but against bows and arrows and even rocks fired by tiny, three-foot-tall creatures.

Many of George Lucas’s choices, in revising the second and third movies, were based on appealing to children and selling more toys. This may have influenced the trilogy’s ending, which deserves to be remembered as the most absurd happy ending in history. It’s one thing to tell children that their dead loved ones are in “a better place,” or for a character to have a mystical experience in which he or she hears a dead loved one at a crucial time. It’s another to have all of the dead major characters show up as smiling ghosts, and to include the main villain among them, without any hint of strife between him and those who opposed him.[62]

Those who derided the illogical silliness of the prequel films weren’t paying attention all along. Or maybe they had been too young to pay attention during the first trilogy, but were now old enough to notice the stupidity the second time around. When I saw a child Anakin Skywalker, in *The Phantom Menace*, accidentally fly a ship into combat, conveniently not get shot down, accidentally enter the enemy mothership, accidentally shoot every single opponent in the room, stumble into a convenient way to blow that ship up, and conveniently escape unscathed, I cringed with everyone else. But I also saw the same anti-intellectualism in Luke’s story, taken to the next level. Virtually every flaw in the prequel trilogy had been there in the original movies, but nostalgia wouldn’t let people see it.

We can blame *Star Wars* for the heavily merchandised franchise summer-blockbuster model, but the focus on cool visuals and special effects, as well as generating ideas without thinking through their implications, might actually be more damaging. Today, many lament how special effects substitute for good scripts, and how talented and powerful people could spend absurdly high budgets, yet push movies from script to theater without fixing obvious logical problems. Here, too, the success of *Star Wars* has had a profound influence.

And it’s here, more than in any other way, that *Star Wars* broke cinema.

The Krypton of 1978’s *Superman* was solid science fiction, austere and alien. The Krypton of 2013’s *Man of Steel* is science fantasy in the *Star Wars* mold. Superman’s father is recast as an action hero, because that’s more dramatic. Everything’s bright and visually stunning, yet nothing makes sense.

Star Trek is often contrasted with *Star Wars*, the former being more science fiction and the latter more science fantasy. Traditionally, *Star Trek* has been about ideas – not cool "ideas" like lightsabers, or loose themes (like "finding your destiny"), but actual philosophical and social ideas, the implications of which are played out through the plot. Yet when it came time to reboot *Star Trek* with the 2009 film, director J. J. Abrams – who, by his own admission, was more a fan of *Star Wars* – delivered a movie stripped of any philosophical or social depth. Instead, he delivered a film focused on slick and beautiful visuals and almost constant drama. When Scotty beams aboard the *Enterprise*, he's conveniently stuck inside tubes filled with goo, which we've never seen before and which don't really make any sense. But it adds yet another moment in an unending litany of breathless drama, and that's why it's there. It doesn't need to make any more sense than *Empire*'s space worm. Still, the movie's about as smart as glitzy, dumb sci-fi melodrama can get. Given more freedom for the sequel, 2013's *Star Trek into Darkness*, Abrams delivered a movie filled with more stunning plot holes than any *Star Wars* film – because if *Star Wars* is your model, such plot holes don't matter. That's why Abrams was such a good choice to direct *The Force Awakens*. He had already made a great *Star Wars* movie and another bad one. They were just called *Star Trek*.

The movies of the Marvel Cinematic Universe show these same concerns. They're visually slick, filled with special effects and fun elements. But when Tony Stark, in 2010's *Iron Man 2*, needs to fix his ailing heart, he just pulls some tubes together and rapidly *synthesizes a new atomic element*. This is how really dumb people see really smart people: they're magic. As with Luke Skywalker, hard work is optional, and you're *born* smart, just like you're born with Jedi powers. 2014's *Guardians of the Galaxy* opens with Star-Lord, a loveable Han Solo-ish rogue (except a less intelligent variation thereof), taking an orb we later learn is absurdly powerful and sought by equally powerful villains… yet which is sitting, waiting to be claimed by anyone with a jetpack. The movie's filled with such plot holes, yet its science-fantasy charm won audiences over, including plenty of supposedly respectable critics who should have at least noticed and admitted these huge problems. Even more than Luke Skywalker, Star-Lord is a know-nothing who succeeds, despite having no plan (a frequent source of laughs in the film), through sheer inherent goodness.

There's a scene in Tim Burton's charming 1994 biopic *Ed Wood* in which the titular director, while filming a scene, is told that an actor knocked over one of the phony tombstones on a cemetery set during a take. It looks cheap and awful. Wood replies that audiences don't care about such details, and leaves the gaffe in the film. It's a humorous illustration of how Wood, reputed to be one of the worst directors of all time, was terrible at his job. But it's impossible not to appreciate, as Burton does, Wood's innocent enthusiasm and visionary certainty, even when he's wrong. In terms of today's big-budget movies, Wood is both right and wrong in this scene. He is more wrong than ever, because that toppled tombstone is a visual element. Today, that tombstone might well have been rendered in glorious computer-generated imagery. Audiences, fed on *Star Wars* and its imitators, expect visual perfection. But we can well imagine executives responding to illogical aspects of the plot exactly as Wood does. How does a space worm exist? How did characters not notice it earlier? Audiences really don't care about such details.

We shouldn't ignore the fact that *Star Wars* was aimed at children. There's nothing wrong with kids' films, of course, and some are quite good. And it's great that adults can now enjoy them without shame. But securing a more general-audiences rating is now considered far more important than having a quality script. After all, it's a much better determiner of a movie's financial success. When *Star Wars* debuted, it was a revelation for many children. Today, the most successful mass culture has to pass through a bizarre "child-friendly" filter that is more troubled by showing the *consequences* of violence (e.g. ugly wounds, long-term physical and psychological trauma) than violence itself (faceless stormtroopers are okay), that eschews human sexuality, and that values cool ideas over thinking anything through.

What makes all of this much sadder is that many film historians regard the 1970s as a kind of Golden Age of Hollywood cinema. The big-budget spectacles and musicals of the 1960s had failed to sustain box-office revenues, in the wake of television, and Hollywood contracted. Hollywood's 1970s output is often characterized by a willingness to confront viewers and their values, stemming from late 1960s movies such as *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Graduate*, *Easy Rider*, and *Midnight Cowboy*. Detective stories got grittier and more realistic in movies like *The French*

Connection, *Dirty Harry*, and *Chinatown*. The quality of Hollywood's writing arguably reached a peak never seen before or since, with excellently written movies with a social conscience, like *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Network*. Many historians regard this period of Hollywood history as the "auteur" era, in which writers and directors were given great artistic freedoms to make their masterpieces. American cinema seemed to be merging with, or at least growing closer to, European cinema.

And then came *Star Wars*.

The 2013 documentary *Jodorowsky's Dune* posits a kind of alternate history, in which the Chilean arthouse director Alejandro Jodorowsky was able to get Hollywood funding for his adaptation of Frank Herbert's sci-fi novel *Dune*, prior to *Star Wars* being produced. The documentary argues that Jodorowsky's *Dune* could have been a success, given its similarities to *Star Wars*. These similarities may run deeper than the documentary indicates; Jodorowsky (and his work on *Dune*, in particular) was both intensely visually driven and far more instinctual than logical, in terms of its plot. But while he is perhaps no more likely than Lucas to delicately and logically tease out a plot, his work tends to be visionary in a way that makes his intuitive choices far more profound. They resonate with religious and philosophical implications that go far beyond superficial treatment of themes. Jodorowsky is also unafraid of controversy and graphic imagery. The result might have been something that struck many of the same cultural chords as *Star Wars* – and had some of the same problems – yet maintained some adult profundity. The auteur era might have continued. And while a space might have been carved out, much as it did with *Star Wars*, for the visual over the plot, this might have come with the expectation that those visuals be more than just fun. Even if this existed alongside *Star Wars*, many of the larger effects of *Star Wars* might have been blunted.

Jodorowsky's film might also have been a commercial disaster, too weird for American audiences to embrace. But the documentary about his aborted *Dune* does invite us to imagine how our culture might have evolved differently, if a crazy, even more visual, adult movie wound up occupying the central space now taken up by *Star Wars*.

It's hard to imagine. But it's only hard to imagine because *Star Wars* changed the cinematic world so greatly.

The negative effects of *Star Wars* even go beyond cinema. These effects are now so central that they have affected, or infected, other media as well. American comic books have been particularly damaged. Eager to ape superhero movies following the *Star Wars* model, American comics have gotten prettier. For them, computer coloring is probably the equivalent of computer-generated special effects. Comics are slicker and glitzier than ever before, but gone are the small, monthly stories; everything has to be high-stakes melodrama. At the same time, a culture of cool "ideas," without rational justification or extrapolation, has taken hold. Vague themes substitute for meaning. Meanwhile, the plots themselves often have absurdly obvious and logically catastrophic problems.

Nor has prose been spared. It's no surprise that a culture that confuses *Star Wars* for good cinema, however fun it may be, isn't inclined toward literary fiction, with its focus on carefully teasing out its plots. The more literary the genre or subgenre, the more prose sales have declined, to the point at which many acclaimed writers live below the poverty line. Everyone else seems to be imitating cinema, to one extent of another, and this means more and more novels adopting the cultural values *Star Wars* wrought.

Surely, the cultural trends that catapulted the values of *Star Wars* into the center of cinematic culture are the same ones that now spur us to critique our politicians' self-presentation more than their content. The culture that asserts that the space worm can only be critiqued in terms of its entertainment value also asserts that economic proposals can only be critiqued in terms of how they make us *feel*. The culture that asks no hard work of us at the movie theater also asks so little of us as citizens. America has a long and deep strain of anti-intellectualism. *Star Wars* didn't make us so intellectually phobic. But we shouldn't pretend that its success, and the success of its many inheritors, is unrelated to these broader tendencies.

I'm glad *Star Wars* exists. Personally, I'm glad for more sci-fi, too. There's room for science-fantasy melodrama with cool visuals, aimed at the young and enjoyed by all. There's room for glitzy movies that are kind of dumb, just as there's room for emotionally satisfying parables about the power of believing in yourself. It's not fair to blame *Star Wars* for everything it has wrought. But that influence has been so profound that it's

marginalized other, perhaps richer, cinematic values. And we’re all paying the price.

Deconstructing the Star Wars Holiday Special

by Steven H. Wilson

It is an oddity that baffles modern *Star Wars* fans, a *thing* that just isn't like the others. Old-line fans may point in dismay to the prequel trilogy and call those films a collective, CGI-driven muddle, but new enthusiasts can just as easily point to the *second* two hours of *Star Wars* ever produced, which arrived on television screens more than two years before *The Empire Strikes Back* hit theaters, and demand, "What the hell was *that*?"

It's a fair question, for although the *Star Wars Holiday Special* features most of the original cast of the first film – including Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Harrison Ford, Peter Mayhew, Anthony Daniels, Kenny Baker, and James Earl Jones – it bears little resemblance to anything one might gift with the label *Star Wars.* Indeed, if you look at the names of the production team, you will see few familiar ones from the science-fiction genre and, most notably, George Lucas is not one of them. The writers, producers, and director are people who had nothing to do with *Star Wars* before, and haven't since.

And the guest stars? Art Carney? Harvey Korman? Diahann Carroll? Beatrice Arthur? Celebrated entertainers all, but hardly names one would associate with the most successful space opera of all time. They *were* names very familiar to 1970s viewers, however, who were well-nourished on TV variety shows by late 1978 when the *Holiday Special* aired. And therein lies the key to putting this particular space oddity into a context in which it makes sense. This show was not about giving theatergoers more *Star Wars*, and certainly not about pleasing science-fiction fans. It was about using a

film that had, much to the surprise of execs touting buddy-cop shows, disco films, and urban sitcoms, succeeded beyond the dreams of avarice. The networks wanted to sell soap, soup, or some sort of slop, and they figured this here popular *Star Wars* thing was the way to do that. They'd make a special and slap the *Star Wars* name on it, guarantee high ratings because of the film's success, and be able to charge premium ad rates to sponsors.

What kind of television special would they make? In 1978, there were only two kinds: the Olympics and the TV variety show.

AN ALL-NEW TELEVISION SPECIAL
STAR WARS
HOLIDAY SPECIAL
A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...
Luke Skywalker and Han Solo battle evil Imperial forces to help Chewbacca reach his imperiled family on the Wookiee planet – in time for Life Day, their most important day of the year!
Starring
MARK HAMILL as Luke Skywalker™
HARRISON FORD as Han Solo™
CARRIE FISHER as Princess Leia™
With
ANTHONY DANIELS as C-3PO™
PETER MAYHEW as Chewbacca™
R2-D2™ as himself
And
JAMES EARL JONES as the voice of Darth Vader™
WITH THEIR SPECIAL GUEST STARS:
BEATRICE ARTHUR
ART CARNEY
DIAHANN CARROLL
THE JEFFERSON STARSHIP AND
HARVEY KORMAN
8PM

The ad for the *Star Wars Holiday Special* that appeared in *TV Guide* promised battles with Imperial troops to save imperiled Wookiees.

Before delving further into the mysteries of this unique entertainment form of days gone by, let's talk about what it is viewers saw when they tuned their sets to the ABC television network that Friday evening in 1978. Fans of the day may remember, but modern fans have had no (legitimate) option for reliving that dubious glory, since the show is the only piece of *Star Wars* video *never* re-aired or officially released for home video.

It's 17 November, the Friday before Thanksgiving, at 8 PM. An estimated 13 million households in the United States are treated to the sight of Han Solo and Chewbacca in the cockpit of the *Millennium Falcon,* desperately trying to avoid an attack by Imperial cruisers (stock footage

from the first *Star Wars* film). Han says he's turning back. He knows Chewie's family is waiting for him, and that it's an important day, but... okay, he'll go to light speed and try to "outrun that Imperial garbage scow." Chewie will be celebrating Life Day before he knows it.

Cut to credits. A familiar fanfare backs the already-legendary words, "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away... *Star Wars*." But quickly, the words "Holiday Special" appear, and an un-credited announcer doing his best Dick Tufeld[63] announces the cast. Surprisingly, Kenny Baker is not credited as R2-D2, even though he's inside the costume. We're promised appearances by Bea Arthur (familiar to audiences as Edith Bunker's staunch, feminist cousin Maude Findlay), Jackie Gleason's longtime sidekick Art Carney, The Jefferson Starship, Diahann Carroll, and Harvey Korman, plus – the piece that fans were *really* excited about – an animated *Star Wars* short.

The curtain rises on a painting of a Frank Lloyd Wright treehouse, situated on Kashyyyk, the Wookiee[64] homeworld. It's not named, but we gather it's the Wookiee homeworld once the camera moves inside and we see three Wookiees. Lumpy, Chewbacca's son, annoys grandfather Itchy, Chewie's dad, with a toy spaceship. Malla, Mrs. Chewbacca, is working in the kitchen. A Wookiee in an apron is something to behold.

Lumpy tries to sneak some of his mom's baked goods (which we'll learn are called "Wookiee Ookies"), then decides it's a good idea to use the balcony railing as a balance beam. Presumably, this was intended to show that Wookiees are comfortable balancing at great heights among trees. Malla and Itchy gaze longingly at a photo of Chewbacca, and then Itchy chases Lumpy to the holo-table, where he watches jugglers, a gymnast, and tumblers. Many variety shows featured such acts, most likely to give viewers extra time to go to the kitchen and prepare snacks, since networks didn't want them to miss any commercials. It is impressive to consider, however, that all of these holographic antics were put together on a television budget without CGI.

Lumpy is sad when the holographic ballet ends. Mom makes him wash the dishes. As soon as she's not looking, he goes to the terminal to check on his dad's status, but the screen advises "No Starships in Area." More deeply saddened, Lumpy calls Luke and Artoo. Luke is in a hangar, working on an engine, and wearing extremely heavy makeup to hide the scars from Mark

Hamill's recent car accident. After ten minutes of nothing but Wookiee growls and calliope music, a human voice and some actual dialogue are welcome.

Luke does not speak Wookiee, but he recognizes Wookiee for "Chewbacca" – which, naturally, sounds nothing like "Chewbacca." Luke tells Lumpy that Chewie left on schedule, but it's strange that he and Han are overdue. Still, Luke knows that Chewie hasn't missed a Life Day yet. Luke does some very awkward flirting to get Malla to smile, then gets back to the engine he's working on, after which R2-D2 floods the room with dry-ice fog for no apparent reason.

Malla calls a nearby trading post, where proprietor Saun Dann (Art Carney) is welcoming an off-duty Imperial guard (Lev Mailer) to his shop. Mailer should be familiar to *Star Trek* fans as the über-creepy Bilar from "Return of the Archons," who shrieks "Festival, Festival!" in falsetto as buildings burn and women are raped in silhouette. That was his first television role, and is memorable for how daring it was for 1960s prime-time TV. Here, Mailer hides behind a moustache so large that one suspects it was provided by Jim Henson. It's quite a counterpoint to the trademark Imperial guard helmet, which looks like nothing so much as half of a giant, black olive.

Never has it been so obvious that John Williams scored *Lost in Space* before *Star Wars*. The music underscoring this labored scene would as easily have accompanied a sparring match between Doctor Smith and the Robot. Ironically, it was not written by Williams, but by Ian Fraser, who had worked on Rex Harrison's *Doctor Dolittle*. Watching this scene, viewers can't help but be reminded that it was made during the Jimmy Carter Administration, since Carney is certainly doing his part to conserve energy. The back-and-forth between Carney and Mailer is as meandering as the earlier, dialogue-free Wookiee scenes, and manages to advance the plot even less.

Malla calls on the wallscreen. Saun Dann, clearly speaking in code, tells Mala that the "shaggy carpet" she ordered is on its way, made by a little old lady four planets away. "She did it all by herself," he says. "She did it by *hand* – SOLO." Sadly, this pathetic and painfully non-subtle effort may be the funniest line in the show. We have no idea how Saun Dann knows Han's

and Chewie's status, but it's clear now that he's with the Rebel Alliance. Aren't they lucky?

Mailer's Imperial guard takes an electronic groomer without paying for it, and we cut, joyfully, to stock shots of Darth Vader aboard his cruiser. He wants the Rebels located. And... scene!

Well, that was, um... Yeah. I-is Vader coming back? No? Oh, well...

A return to the Wookiee treehouse offers an opportunity to showcase another guest star, Korman, this time as Gormaanda, the multi-limbed, intergalactic Julia Child. Gormaanda shows us how to prepare Bantha Surprise, which includes succulent chunks of Bantha loin, cut into bite-sized chunks. "And only *you* know the size of a bite in *your* family," (s)he chuckles. Yes, Korman milks these lines for all their suggestive glee, but one wonders why no actual situational humor was incorporated into the scene. If this is funny, it's only because Julia Child herself was funny. There's nothing over-the-top, no real caricature going on here. Viewers must surely have been praying for Korman to "cut the dickens out of [his] finger," but no. Gormaanda sings the praises of the Bantha rump and makes a real show of whipping and stirring the dish, and we cut to Han and Chewie being attacked by TIE fighters. The boys came out of hyperspace into the middle of an Imperial convoy.

Back home, an Imperial officer proclaims martial law on Kashyyyk. A blockade will ensure that no ships come or go. There's a knock at the door. Itchy answers, one assumes because he's the slowest and the director is clearly padding for time. Saun Dann enters with Life Day gifts, asking, "Why all the long, hairy faces?" After all, *he* made it through the blockade (which is interesting, since it is never established that his trading post is off-planet). Saun Dann's Life Day gift for Itchy looks like a salon hairdryer, but is apparently a holographic porn booth. Carroll appears in a fabulous Bob Mackie gown to tell Itchy that she *wants* him, and to sing to him. We're given to believe that this non-human's erotic fantasy is this very human woman. Why it wouldn't be another Wookiee is anybody's guess. Apparently, the production team intended this scene to actually be a piece of soft-core porn that would make it past the censors. Perhaps it was to have done that by lulling them to sleep.

The scene fades to C-3PO at the Rebel base, calling in because Leia wants to speak to Han and Chewie. The princess is surprised to learn that

they haven’t yet arrived. Clearly frustrated with the droid's efforts to act as an interpreter, she asks if Malla is alone, almost palpably radiating her true meaning: “Is there anybody there who speaks *English*, dammit*?”* Saun Dann steps up to exchange almost no information with Leia, other than that he’s a friend of the Rebellion.

The *Falcon* arrives in the Kashyyyk system, and Han announces that they’re going to land on the north side to avoid the blockade. Clearly, the Imperials are only patrolling *half* of a spherical planet. Chewbacca’s family must live on the north side, because they immediately hear the ship arriving. Lumpy runs for the door and opens it... to find stormtroopers standing there. After a dramatic cut to commercial, we return to about 60 seconds of glaring and grunting before one of the stormtroopers tells his nameless superior (played by Jack Rader – let’s call him Officer Dick), “This unit is occupied by four Wookiees,” and the officer asks where the fourth is hiding. Saun Dann attempts a very lame distraction, and the officer orders a search.

An Imperial guard (Michael Potter) then asks Lumpy where his dad is, threatening to beat him when the young Wookiee doesn’t answer. Saun Dann comes to the rescue, distracting the guard with yet another piece of video technology: a portable player which shows him The Jefferson Starship, singing “Light the Sky on Fire” as purple lights flare from their instruments and mics. (I like to think of this band as being called, in-universe, Jefferson Star Destroyer.) At the end, the guard smiles, and God, it’s creepy.

Lumpy and Itchy try to block the Imperials from going upstairs. Officer Dick explains, ve-ry loud-ly and ve-ry slow-ly, that the troopers don’t want to hurt anyone, but that Malla must keep Lumpy quiet. So she leads the boy to yet *another* entertainment console. We begin to wonder if, once upon a time, missionaries led a campaign to buy video equipment for underprivileged Wookiees and succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. As the troops go upstairs, Lumpy watches...

(Drumroll, please!)

The only reason anybody could remotely find this *Holiday Special* cool...

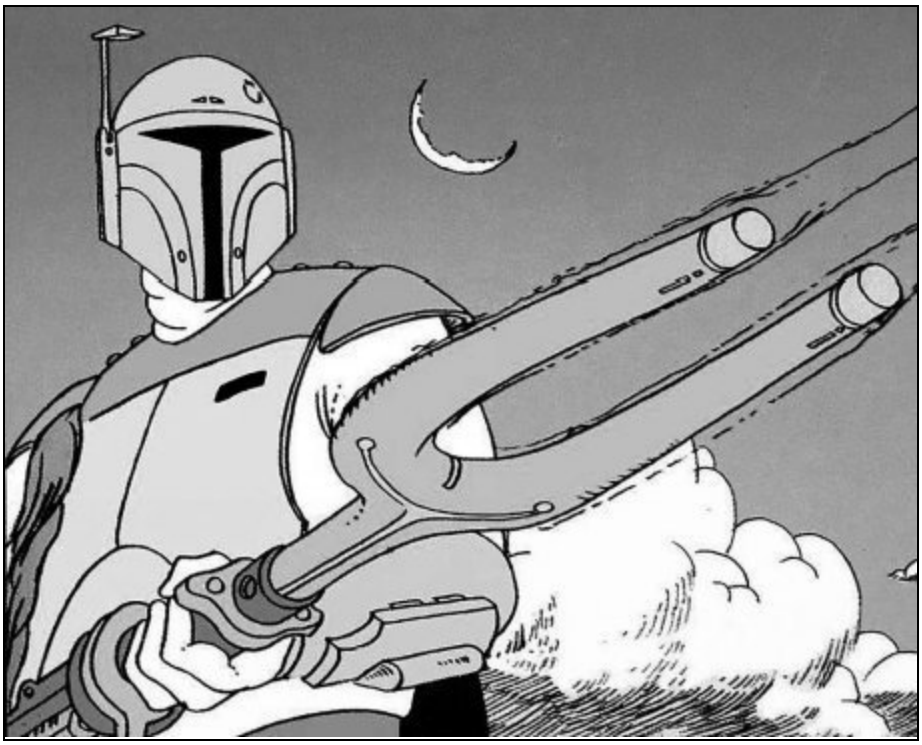
The cartoon.

Rebel Captain Kazan tells us, in voiceover, that Han Solo is missing. He's been searching for a talisman that makes things invisible. Luke, Leia, and the droids are monitoring as the *Falcon* suddenly shows up with Chewie piloting, and Han can be seen hanging by his ankles in the cockpit. The *Falcon* is on a collision course with the Rebel base. Luke and the droids go to intercept.

Both ships crash on a world that looks like the Sea of Holes in *The Yellow Submarine.* Luke is menaced by a purple monster, but Boba Fett arrives just in time to zap it and save them. The friendly, helpful Fett offers to take Luke to find the ship he's looking for. They find the *Falcon* in time to see Chewie toss the sought-after invisibility talisman into the waste disposal. Luke passes out – a result, Artoo says, of a sleeping virus in the talisman. The only way to keep an infected human alive is to hang him upside down and let the blood run to his head, as Chewie has done with Han. Boba Fett says he knows of this sleeping virus, which the Empire uses on its enemies. In the city nearby is a remedy.

As Fett leads Chewie to the city, Kazan's narration tells us that the Rebels didn't know Fett's real plan. The narration is unnecessary, as Fett immediately calls Darth Vader and tells him they've got the Rebels where they want them. Vader comments that he sees why they call Fett the best bounty hunter in the galaxy. Unfortunately for their dastardly plan, R2-D2, worried about his friends, has chosen that moment to "find them on the viewscreen." It's not explained what type of technology Artoo would use to pull up two people on a viewscreen when they aren't transmitting, but he taps right in on Vader's signal, and Artoo and C-3PO know all.

Cut to Lumpy, who is on the edge of his seat at this twist.



The cartoon segment of the *Holiday Special* featuring Boba Fett is widely considered to be one of the only, if not *the* only, redeeming features of the program.

Despite Boba Fett's secret treachery, he delivers the promised cure to Luke and Han. Luke calls Fett a hero and a faithful friend, but the droids spill the beans: Boba is Vader's right-hand man.

It's important to remember, at this point in *Star Wars* history, that fans knew nothing about Boba Fett, other than the fact that an action figure of the character had been released as a giveaway premium on cereal boxes, and that he was going to be important in the upcoming second film, *The Empire Strikes Back*. This animated appearance was his first on any screen. Sadly, everything to follow is a bit anti-climactic for the character. He isn't "Vader's right-hand man" after all, just a hired goon with an admittedly cool costume. Still, the excitement fans felt at the introduction of this new villain was certainly the emotional highlight of both the *Holiday Special* and Fett's career as a character.

See-Threepio cracks a silly joke, everyone laughs, including Lumpy, and we're unfortunately back to live action, where the Imperials are trashing Lumpy's room. One of them finds a stuffed animal (a Bantha?) and rips its head off. We don't need further assurance that these are bad dudes. Officer Dick chuckles, pleased with himself, while Lumpy cries over his

toy and puts it gently to bed, covering it with a blanket. Lumpy, galvanized to action, decides to build a transmitter, no doubt hoping to warn his father of the danger on the home front. Of course, building the transmitter requires watching a video (on yet *another* telescreen) of good ol' Harvey Korman, this time playing Dromboid, an Amorphian. An announcer cautions us that Amorphian citizens tend to lose energy and slow down, so we watch Korman impersonate a wind-up man for a few minutes. It's a bit funnier than the Bantha Chef sketch, but only a bit. At least Korman gets a pratfall at the end.

Unaware of Lumpy's espionage attempts, Officer Dick and his men settle down to watch some Imperial propaganda titled *Life on Tatooine*. We're quickly swept into the cantina, where Bea Arthur, as Ackmena, minds the bar. Many familiar faces are seen, including Greedo's. Oh, right, Greedo's dead. We learn that this is Bludlow, who must be a relative since he looks just like him and wears his clothes. Korman, now playing Krelman, comes in for a drink – which, his being an alien and all, he pours into the large hole in the top of his head.

What follows is a very typical variety show comedy sketch about a female bartender who offers a typical "Come back soon, I'll be waiting!" to a customer and makes him fall in love with her. Krelman doesn't realize that Ackmena says that to all the boys... until she says it to another one of the boys. With the laughter of a studio audience, this might have been funnier for the viewer. The sketch itself would have fit perfectly on *The Carol Burnett Show.*

But Ackmena's screen time doesn't end when the Krelman sketch does. An announcement is made that the Empire has declared a curfew, and everyone needs to go home. Ackmena attempts to chase her customers out the door with a song, "Good night, friend, but not goodbye, friend." Bea sings "Just one more round, friend... Don't forget me in your dreams," backed by the cantina band's signature tune, snuggling a giant rat and even dancing with Greedo/Bludlow.

As the propaganda piece ends, Lumpy is still building his transmitter. Officer Dick is ordered to return to base, but leaves one stormtrooper to wait for Chewbacca. This worthy soldier catches Lumpy at work and, after a silent battle of wills, smashes the transmitter. But Stormy's property-damaging days are soon over, for Chewie and Han arrive. After a brief,

armed standoff, Han disarms the hapless trooper (apparently called Officer B4711) and pitches him over a balcony railing to his death. It's such a heartwarming family moment that Han and Chewie just have to stop and hug. Han then warns his friend that the Empire will be looking for the dead body... the one laying on the ground... right under Chewbacca's house... but nobody bothers to, like, *hide the body.*

Chewie goes inside to greet his family. We get to see Wookiees make out, which is kind of a thrill. Then, as might be expected at a house where there's a dead body on the lawn, there's a knock at the door. Fortunately, it's Saun Dann, who has finally made himself useful by disposing of Officer B4711. When an Impressive Officer calls to ask why B4711 has not responded to radio contacts, Saun Dann explains that B4711 robbed the house and headed for the hills. It's a testament to the quality of Imperial stormtroopers that Impressive Officer accepts this story as fact without so much as blinking.

And now there's nothing left to do but crack out the Life Day lanterns and stand around in a circle. Suddenly, the whole family is wearing robes and marching through space, into a big ball of light.

This is not surprising, really. Stuff like this just tended to happen in the Seventies. You had to be there.

The ball of light is a gateway to a forest amphitheater made of giant tree trunks, where R2-D2 and C-3PO are waiting for the Wookiees. See-Threepio sadly reflects that, at times like this, he and R2-D2 wish they were more than "just mechanical beings." Luke, Leia, and Han show up, with Luke, for no reason, wearing his Tatooine garb.

A possibly stoned Princess Leia leads the band of Rebels in song to celebrate Wookiee Life Day.

"This is your day," Leia says, "but we're all the same in our struggle against darkness." Then she sings, "We celebrate a day of peace," and we see close-ups of all the cast, as the "*Star Wars* Main Title" theme completely overpowers Leia's song. There are flashbacks to the first *Star Wars* film as Chewbacca remembers all that he's been through with his friends.

Finally, the family is back at their dinner table, holding hands and bowing their heads. It's never explained where they've been or how all their human and droid friends got there. In Seventies family-show style, we leave them behind, panning out to show the lights of their home glowing in the night.

After the credits roll, slides of Lynda Carter and Lou Ferrigno promise viewers that *Wonder Woman* and *The Incredible Hulk* will return in this time slot next week. There is probably much rejoicing.

Soooooo....

How did this happen? The exact moment that someone said, "Let's make a *Star Wars* holiday special!" is lost to history, as is the identity of the first person to say it. *Star Wars* was still in theaters in the fall of 1977. The

cantina aliens were showing up on TV, on *Donny & Marie* and other variety shows. The "*Star Wars* Main Title" theme was on the Billboard Top 40 list, and was even being parodied on *Saturday Night Live*. Charles Lippincott, in charge of merchandising for what was then the *Star Wars* Corporation, told *Vanity Fair* in 2008 that all the TV attention had "helped revive our box office."[65]

Star Wars was big, and at least one network wanted a part of it. CBS approached Lucas about getting his property on TV, during a huge sweeps week, just before Thanksgiving. Lucas, working to prepare a sequel that would be almost four more years coming, dusted off a plot from his archives that he thought would make good TV, and the project was green-lighted. Unfortunately, network executives are often slow to observe that what's worked in the past isn't working anymore. To their traditionalist minds, a variety show was what you made when you put together a holiday special. But the variety show as a viable TV format was already dying.

The variety show format was a proven winner with a long history. With roots in Vaudeville – popular shows of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, which brought comedians, musicians, magicians, and animal acts to local music halls, theaters, and any other venue that would have them – variety carried forward through the days of radio. Programs like *The Grand Ole Opry, The Jack Benny Program*, and *The Kraft Music Hall* paved the way for such television series as *The Ed Sullivan Show, Your Show of Shows*, and, later, *Sonny & Cher, Carol Burnett*, and *Donny & Marie*. By the 1970s, variety shows were principally made up of comedy sketches interlaced with musical acts. An entire class of entertainers were, so far as American TV audiences knew, employed solely in the business of appearing on variety shows: Steve Laurence and Edie Gourmet, Red Buttons, Charro, Sammy Davis, Jr... A lot of these singer/comedians could trace their career origins to the Borscht Belt, resorts popular with Jewish residents of New York City for about half of the 20th Century, where many celebrated comedians got their start in nightclubs. Indeed, Bea Arthur, a guest star for this holiday foray, was one such comedian.

But a funny (funny *strange*, not funny *ha-ha*) thing happened to the variety show at the end of the 1960s. Networks, in what came to be called the "rural purge," canceled wholesale many programs which, though long-

running and still successful in their time slots, had been found to appeal to an older, rural demographic. Not only folksy comedies like *Green Acres*, *Mayberry RFD*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* got the axe, but so did Westerns like *The Virginian*, as well as variety shows which skewed to an older audience, like *The Lawrence Welk Show* and *Hee Haw.* (These latter two got their revenge, however, moving immediately into syndication and achieving much greater success.)

Put simply, network execs like the recently installed Fred Silverman at CBS wanted to be *hip*. They wanted shows that attracted a younger, urban audience who spent more dollars on advertisers' products. Programs like *All in the Family* and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* appealed to this demographic, dealing less with caricatures and more with characters, and offering topical humor that was a departure from the well-worn, hand-tooled jokes of the variety show.

This is not to say, however, that the execs threw the baby out with the bathwater. They did introduce new variety shows with younger stars and more urbane comedy. Donny and Marie Osmond, Sonny and Cher Bono, and especially Carol Burnett found success well into the '70s. But by the time the *Star Wars Holiday Special* was being conceived, the handwriting was on the wall for the format. Even though the deathblow to TV variety had yet to be dealt – that would happen in 1980, when Silverman himself approved the atrocious *Pink Lady and Jeff* – variety was on its way out. The adventures of Chewbacca and his family played to an audience already weary of the format, and did not offer enough of the flavor of *Star Wars* to enchant hardcore fans.

And it didn't help that, unlike every other variety show ever staged, this one did *not* have a live audience, or even a laugh track. That sapped the energy, and probably robbed the special of some of the comfort that a carefully groomed audience might otherwise have taken in its traditional format. It's a bit surprising that the production company, Hemion and Smith, known for musical variety specials, didn't anticipate that outcome. Dwight Hemion was a veteran of Steve Allen's *Tonight Show*, while Gary Smith's entertainment pedigree dated back to the *Kraft Music Hall*, hosted on radio by Bing Crosby. Together, the two had produced highly successful TV specials for Barbara Streisand and Frank Sinatra. They would go on to

helm no less than two Presidential Inauguration galas, for Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.

Bruce Vilanch, the first writer hired to work with Lucas in developing the special, takes part of the hit for the final format. Vilanch, familiar to many TV viewers as an outrageous and flamboyant panelist on *The Hollywood Squares* (he was also that show's head writer at the time of his appearances), was still relatively new in the business when he was commissioned to develop George Lucas's idea "from the vault" into a show. He had impressive credits, though. He'd written on Broadway for Bette Midler, and on television for *Donny & Marie.* In characteristic style, Vilanch said in 1999, on the Combustible Celluloid website, that he knew there was trouble at the initial pitch session:[66]

> The Wookiees were the central characters. Unfortunately all the Wookiees look like me and sound like fat people having orgasms. So, they're tough to write for. Every line of dialogue is "oh, ee, ahh." How do you write that? The Wookiees can't speak, but the Wookiees were the central characters. So I said, "well we have to load this up with stars who sing and dance and do schtick to cover up that the story is about these walking carpets."

Ultimately, although Lucas contributed the original story and named Chewbacca's family members, his name was nowhere to be seen in the credits of the show. Patty Maloney, who played Lumpy, recalled[67] that the dailies were shipped to Lucas for his approval, but that the series creator was too busy, apparently, to pay them more than passing attention. Lucas has made it well known that he would personally smash every bootleg copy of the *Holiday Special* if he had a hammer and enough time, and he has never authorized a commercial video release.[68]

But a large team of writers worked on the final product, including Pat Proft and Leonard Ripps, who had contributed to the *Shields and Yarnell Show*. Perhaps Smith and Hemion thought a pair who'd written for mimes could write for Wookiees who didn't speak English and wouldn't be subtitled. Ripps would later write for *Bosom Buddies*, and Proft for many popular film spoofs, such as the *Naked Gun* and *Scary Movie* series. The team also included Rod Warren, an Emmy-winning writer who had worked for Lily Tomlin and the Smothers Brothers, and Mitzie Welch, with husband Ken, a composer for *The Carol Burnett Show*. The Welches also contributed the songs sung by Carrie Fisher and the celebrity guest stars.

In an effort to make something unique, Lucas and company selected David Acomba, who'd won Canada's Best Picture and Best Director

awards, to wrangle Wookiees, droids, Imperials, and guest stars. Acomba recommended (with Lucas's approval, since Lucas was a fan) Canadian animation firm Nelvana Ltd. to create the animated short for the special. Based on a nine-page storyline written by Lucas, with scene breakdowns by Rod Warren, "The Story of the Faithful Wookie"[69] was the jewel in an otherwise-tarnished crown.

But Acomba did not last. A film director, he wasn't comfortable in the TV environment. Most TV directors stay in the control booth and call the shots. Acomba stayed on the floor with cast and crew, annoying TV veterans who must have felt their competence was being questioned. Probably his biggest directorial contribution to the special was Bea Arthur's cantina scene, born of a filming session that went on all night, causing several actors in heavy suits to pass out from a lack of oxygen.

An interesting aside: Arthur later reflected[70] that she didn't realize the scene was part of *Star Wars.* She just wondered why she was singing to so many guys with funny-looking heads. The final scene Acomba shot was of The Jefferson Starship, lip-synching "Light the Sky on Fire." Acomba was responsible for Starship's presence on the show, but this was an especially frustrating shoot for him, as the special effects were not working as planned. Without even telling his agent, he sent Smith and Hemion a telegram saying he was quitting.

Bea Arthur played a singing bartender at the Mos Eisley cantina, though the actress never realized that she was filming anything in the *Star Wars* universe.

Hemion was likely responsible for bringing in new director Steve Binder, another protégé of Steve Allen. Binder landed the over-budget,

past-deadline project for them. It was Binder who had the dubious honor of working with the principal cast – Ford, Fisher, Hamill, and Mayhew – who were largely reluctant to be part of the proceedings. Ford had no desire at all to work in television, which was then considered a step down from film for an actor, and Fisher would participate only if given a song to perform. Still, Binder has been quoted[71] as saying that the film stars were thoroughly professional and a joy to direct.

As noted earlier, few veterans of the science fiction and fantasy film genres were involved. This was a variety show to its core, and was handled as one. Still, a few names do stand out, especially Stan Winston and Ralph McQuarrie. Winston, already an Emmy winner for his makeup work on the TV movie *Gargoyles,* created the Wookiee costumes for the *Star Wars Holiday Special*, though he never worked on any of the *Star Wars* films. He built complex masks, dressed with human hair, featuring mechanized, moving features of his own design. Patty Maloney ("Lumpy") later recalled, in an interview posted at starwarsholidayspecial.com[72], that for close-up shots, Winston would actually stand behind her and work the intricate series of cables controlling Lumpy's facial features. Winston would go on to win Academy Awards for his work on *Aliens, Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and *Jurassic Park.*

McQuarrie's work is certainly familiar to *Star Wars* fans, responsible as he is for so much of the signature *look* of the franchise. He created the storyboards for the original film, as well as the visual designs of Darth Vader, C-3PO, R2-D2, and Chewbacca. It was McQuarrie who conceived the idea that Vader would wear a breathing apparatus. His work helped convince 20th Century Fox to fund the film, and he went on to work as a designer on *Episodes V* and *VI*. For the *Holiday Special*, McQuarrie painted the scenes of the Wookiee home world.

Stuart Freeborn and Rick Baker are also familiar names from the first *Star Wars* film. They created the masks for the cantina scene, which were used again in the special. Freeborn's impressive credit list goes back to 1936. He would go on to work on the next two theatrical films, and is credited as the creator of Greedo. *A New Hope* was Baker's only entry in the film series. It's doubtful that these two actually worked on the special, though. Ben Burtt, credited with "special dialogue and sound effects,"

worked as a sound designer on all *Star Wars* films to date, including *Episode VII: The Force Awakens.*

What Might Have Been

Any film or television program is a collaborative effort, and thus can be expected to evolve through many iterations of story and concept before a final product emerges. Of course, in the case of George Lucas, the product may continue to evolve for decades after its public release, and a new shooting script may be delivered once principal photography is complete. But the *Star Wars Holiday Special* came to the screen without some interesting touches that were present in the original story treatment, recently unearthed and available at the excellent starwarsholidayspecial.com[73] website.

As originally envisioned, Life Day was not merely the Wookiee equivalent of Thanksgiving. It was a galaxy-wide celebration of life, hosted by a different planet each year. This year, it was the Wookiees' turn. Han was so eager to get Chewbacca home not because his furry partner never missed a Life Day, but because, as a leading citizen of his planet, Chewie was to be the Grand Marshal of this year's festivities.

Like the pagan holidays that were absorbed by a Christianized Rome, Life Day was too big and important for even the Empire of *Star Wars* to kill. But that didn't mean the Empire liked it. They didn't, not at all. Life Day was just too closely associated with the spirit of the Rebellion. And like the big Grinches they were, the Imperial baddies were going to find a way to stop Life Day from coming, somehow. Hence, Darth Vader was going to send an agent provocateur (suggested – or, perhaps, suggestive – casting was Raquel Welch) to infiltrate and destroy the starship *Musica*, which was transporting all the entertainers to the festival. The *Musica* would have been commanded by a guest star. No names are given, but since Art Carney's trader and Bea Arthur's barkeep were already firmly in place in the original treatment, it's a safe bet that the captain would have been none other than the versatile Harvey Korman.

An interesting series of coincidences would have placed Lumpy aboard the *Musica* after a whirlwind trip to Tatooine. Said coincidences would have also integrated the cantina scene into the plot of what would have been a

coherent film story. It would also have given Carney more to do than just stand around muttering while he demonstrated more personal electronics than you'd find in your average Best Buy. All of this would have culminated in Chewie flying to his son's rescue, after Raquel Welch's wicked character had (literally) danced her way into the engine room and sabotaged the starship. With Han doing little more than flying by and offering encouraging words, Chewie would have landed the crippled starship safely. Of course, Harrison Ford flipping a man to his death over a balcony and casually suggesting that someone clean that up is sexier.

Rumor has it that one additional guest star was desired by David Acomba, and that was young comedian Robin Williams, who had just landed a new series, *Mork and Mindy.* Neither Williams nor any of the production team later recalled any serious discussions about this, however. [74] In many ways, it's a shame. Perhaps even the dark side of the Force that exerted its influence over this production could have been thwarted by the sheer comic energy that was Robin Williams. We'll never know, and that's too bad.

What remains is an oddity, a curiosity, perhaps an awkward, garish monument to the memory of a form of entertainment that enchanted us during a more innocent time... long ago, in a galaxy far, far away.

The Empire Strikes Gold: Why *Episode V* is the Best *Star Wars* Film, and Other Musings

by Lou Tambone

Sometimes, I like to imagine that George Lucas is an all-powerful deity living at the top of Mount Skywalker who, one fine day in the 1970s, decided it was high time to perform a grand social experiment on humanity by creating an epic narrative called *Star Wars*. He would then spend his time analyzing the saga's effect on people's lives. He'd find himself amused on a daily basis, I'm sure, observing fans endlessly debating things like what is or isn't canon, whether or not Greedo actually shot first, or which film is the best, and even questioning Lucas's own abilities as a filmmaker.

When the original film was released, I was seven years old, the perfect age for this hypothetical social experiment.

I was born in 1970. The Beatles had recently broken up, Jimi Hendrix had just died, Richard Nixon still inhabited the White House, the Vietnam War was dragging on, and in Mill Valley, California, young George Lucas was busily editing his feature-film directorial debut, *THX 1138*. *American Graffiti* and the first *Star Wars* film would follow, but not until 1973 and 1977, respectively.

Seven-year-olds are fairly naïve, honest, open, and, above all else, impressionable. When children of that age venture down the rabbit hole, they usually go all the way down. Any good psychiatrist will tell you that different kinds of seeds to many aspects of adult life are psychologically planted at that young age. Some take root, while others eventually form

nostalgia. For me, *Star Wars* never became simply nostalgic. It was never just a "phase" I went through. It rooted itself firmly in my juvenile mind and grew with me into adulthood. I've been living comfortably down that rabbit hole for a long time.

Suffice it to say that when *The Empire Strikes Back* was released in 1980, it sent me over the Moon. I owned just about every toy, poster, game, trading card, book, piece of music, and garment (including those "fun to wear" Underoos) that bore a *Star Wars* logo. In the pre-internet days, the excitement was very local, shared among friends at school or with relatives at home. We had to buy magazines like *Starlog* and glean little bits of information from them. I was never concerned about the film delivering the goods, because I was free of bias and hadn't yet developed the critical, cynical mind that currently rents the space within my skull.

So when *The Empire Strikes Back* came out, I (like many other kids) was completely blown away. George Lucas, the face of all things *Star Wars*, took what was now being called the "*Star Wars* saga" to an entirely new level that few could have predicted. The film outdid the original in almost every category: acting, budget, direction, story, tone, effects, cinematography, and more, right down the line.

Empire is revered by many as the best of the bunch, and rightly so – but why is this the case? The answers are, of course, subjective. One fan's opinion may differ from the next person's. Let's tackle some important aspects of the film – but it's an iceberg of epic proportions, of which we'll only scratch the tip. Now, imagine George Lucas (my hypothetical mind-deity) sitting back with a tall glass of blue milk reading along with us, analyzing each word…

The Three Ks

The Empire Strikes Back was released in May 1980 to (believe it or not) mixed reviews. Some critics and audience-goers were taken aback by the film's episodic nature, although George Lucas had paraded the fact that this would be a middle episode in numerous interviews. The film had legs, however, and Lucas was able to recoup his out-of-pocket investment of $33 million. But what is it about the film that has earned it such high regard? Is it the script or the direction? Is it the acting and the drama? Is it the darker

tone and the fact that the bad guys come out on top in the end? Every person you might ask will give you a different answer.

Without taking anything away from George Lucas, I tend to attribute the success and longevity of the film to what I refer to as “The Three Ks.”

K1: Irvin Kershner

Lucas has stated, in many interviews, that creating the original *Star Wars* film nearly killed him. At one point during production, in fact, he checked himself into a hospital. Hypertension was the culprit, most likely brought on by the stress of making the movie. His relatively young Industrial Light & Magic division had only completed a handful of effects shots pretty late in the game, and Lucas felt he had lost some control of the production. “They’d spent more than one million dollars of their two-million-dollar budget, and all they had was *three shots*,” he told Dale Pollock in *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*.[75] In the end, as we all know, things turned out fine, but the process left Lucas feeling less than chipper about directing the next installment.

Producer Gary Kurtz recommended Irvin Kershner to Lucas after the latter opted out of directing *The Empire Strikes Back* early in its development. Lucas wanted a director who was a little left of Hollywood, one with plenty of experience, as opposed to a young hot-shot with something to prove. Kershner refused at first, but his agent later convinced him to take the job. Let’s all take a moment to thank Irvin Kershner’s agent.

Well aware that he was spending money directly from Lucas’s movie-wallet, Kershner was determined to do an exceptional job. He shot the script as it was written, but allowed for leeway. His focus on character development came to the forefront, yet the scenes did not suffer from long-winded exposition. He kept the film dark, yet was able to inject humor with ease. He took a fairly inarticulate green puppet and made him into a believable Jedi Master. He fought extreme weather conditions in Finse, Norway; navigated faux-swampy soundstages; managed not to fall from the perilous carbon-freezing chamber set; and who knows what else.

Kershner fought the odds and made the movie *he* wanted to make, somehow keeping Lucas’s vision intact all the while. These were not easy tasks, simple though they may seem in hindsight.

George Lucas on the set of *The Empire Strikes Back* with the Three Ks (left to right): Irvin Kershner, Gary Kurtz, Lucas, and Lawrence Kasnan.

In fact, neither Kershner nor Lucas wanted to make a second *Star Wars* film that simply aped the first. With Kershner at the helm, *Star Wars* was forced to grow up a little. Although plenty of adults loved the first *Star Wars*, it was widely considered a young person's movie. Things got more serious the second time out: main characters' limbs were severed, friends were betrayed, officers were choked to death (multiple times), ancestral secrets were revealed, a beloved hero was frozen in a block of carbonite, and so on. The lack of a happy ending was the final nail in the "it's-a-kid-movie" coffin until the Ewoks restored that image in *Return of the Jedi*... but that's another story for another essay.

K2: Lawrence Kasdan

Rumor has it that George Lucas was always a reluctant writer who never enjoyed the writing process. He was very good at coming up with story ideas, but dialogue wasn't his strong point. His first draft of *THX 1138* wasn't up to snuff, so he brought in Walter Murch to provide some help. *American Graffiti* found Lucas hiring his friends Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz to help write the screenplay. The same duo had been harnessed (albeit uncredited) to polish the script for the first *Star Wars* film. For *The Empire Strikes Back*, Lucas first hired sci-fi author Leigh Brackett to pen a draft,

which left him underwhelmed. Brackett passed away shortly after turning in her first draft, resulting in Lucas penning a few drafts himself and taking the story in a slightly different direction. For the final drafts, however, he felt he needed help yet again.

Lawrence Kasdan had just handed in the script to Lucas's collaboration with Steven Spielberg, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, when Lucas asked him to finish the screenplay to *The Empire Strikes Back* as well. Kasdan was relatively new to Hollywood at the time, but had succeeded in selling his script for *Continental Divide* to Spielberg, one of Lucas's closest friends.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Kasdan's job wasn't simply to re-write the story, but rather to take Lucas's script draft and make it better via clever dialogue and scene flow. Drafts had already been completed by Brackett and Lucas, but the meat needed more tenderizing and marinating before it could truly be called a dinner-worthy steak. Lucas came from a documentary background, in which naked facts are matter-of-factly laid out for viewers, scene by scene. There isn't much to interpret in that format. His storytelling techniques seemed to echo this at times, certainly with his version of *Empire*, in which scenes were laid out very matter-of-factly on the page. Kadsan added elements of darkness, drama, humor, and emotion that Lucas would not have been able to accomplish on his own.

A good example of Kasdan's genius would be his characterization of Yoda. Lucas wanted a character who talked funny or used some kind of different speech pattern. Kasdan took that notion and wrote all of Yoda's dialogue in a sort of backwards speech. We can't truly know if Yoda would have been as popular or as interesting a character without his distinctive speech pattern, but helped, it sure did.

It's no wonder that Kasdan went straight into directing after *Empire* and *Raiders*, with a film of his own called *Body Heat*. His writing demonstrated a natural feel for scene flow and a mastery of witty and memorable dialogue. He brought something to the table that Lucas could not, and kudos to Lucas for being smart enough to recognize it.

K3: Gary Kurtz

The relationship between producer and director is as precarious as it is symbiotic. When it works, it's great – but when it doesn't, it could certainly

spell doom for a production. A producer's main duty is to help guide a film to completion, by handling such tasks as obtaining financing, scouting locations for filming (including studios), and securing distribution. This gives the director the creative freedom he or she needs to work without being bogged down in budgetary meetings or other mundane negotiations. For *The Empire Strikes Back*, George Lucas kept to his inner circle and hired someone familiar to the then-new *Star Wars* universe.

Gary Kurtz had first collaborated with Lucas on *American Graffiti*. With a successful film under their belts, the two decided to give it a go once again with *Star Wars*, which turned out to be another rousing success. Had it not, you most likely wouldn't be reading this right now. Their collaboration on *Empire* would ultimately prove to be their last, but what a great way to go out.

It was clear from the get-go that Kurtz cared deeply about the *Star Wars* universe. He was there at its inception and saw the first film through to screen, embedding himself into every aspect along the way. Kurtz was the kind of producer who liked to step away from the phone and get his hands dirty. The end result (a film of quality) was always the most important thing. Kurtz would do whatever he needed to make sure the project was something worthy of all the months of hard work put in by the entire cast and crew.

With Lucas out of the director's chair for *The Empire Strikes Back*, Kurtz and Kershner led the charge in snowy Norway during the worst winter storm recorded in 50 years. Then they took the battle to London's Elstree Studios to complete principal photography. Kurtz was there every step of the way, working hand in hand with Kershner and trying his best to keep things running smoothly. Unfortunately, the film went over budget, which angered Lucas, who was using his own money to finance the movie. Lucas eventually had to take a loan from 20th Century Fox to finish the film.

It is difficult to assign direct blame for the budget overages – it's usually a combination of too many things to narrow down – but Kurtz felt like Lucas waggled the finger in his direction. "[…] I think he [Lucas] blamed me for all the things that were difficult on *Empire* – a director that was difficult to control, a film that was too expensive, and all those things," he told IGN in 2002.[76]

Roughly two-thirds into the process of creating the film, Kurtz decided he needed to part ways with Lucas and the production. He felt that his ideas for *Star Wars* were becoming far too different than those of its creator, who had begun to make some sweeping changes to his universe. Since the story for what would ultimately be *Return of the Jedi* was somewhat outlined, plans for the third film were informally discussed even before the second was completed. These discussions, along with Lucas's opinion that audiences were more interested in a thrill ride than an actual story, led to Kurtz's departure.

Howard Kazanjian (a fourth K!) was brought in as Kurtz's uncredited replacement for the final third of the film's production, but Kurtz was professional about the whole thing and remained on the project until the movie's release and even a bit later, doing interviews and press to help promote the film. All of this points to an amicable departure, with Kurtz still working alongside Lucas and the team and agreeing to disagree about the saga's direction. As Kurtz told IGN:

> I think we both were frustrated and decided we just didn't want to work together anymore for the time being… One of the problems at that particular moment was it looked to me like *Jedi* was going to be disappointing – with the change in the story, with all of the story material that I had really resonated with being tossed out, and that whole Ewoks thing, and the new Death Star and the same kind of climax of *Star Wars*. It was, from a creative challenge point of view, kind of a rehash.

Back then, Kurtz was arguably the most important influence in George Lucas's life. He wasn't afraid to challenge Lucas and fought for story integrity over steering the film down the merchandising highway. When he left, Mark Hamill described it as "mom and dad getting a divorce."[77] It's this author's opinion that with Kurtz's exit, *Star Wars* lost more than just a producer. It lost a bit of its integrity.

Empire's Episodic Influence on the Modern-Day Trilogy

Sometimes, you can gauge a film's greatness by its ripple effect throughout Hollywood and in pop culture. If people are still talking about your film a decade or two later, chances are you did something right, especially when it comes to today's disposable entertainment industry, in which making a quick buck seems a higher priority than creating something

artistic, important, memorable, and/or influential while still remaining engaging and entertaining.

It's certainly not an easy task to pull off when you consider all the moving parts involved with making a film in the late 1970s. Internet? Home computers? Mobile phones? Those were all quite rare or nonexistent. This meant that filmmakers had to work a lot harder to keep everyone in the loop and on the same page than they would have to today.

The Empire Strikes Back's crew, from George Lucas all the way down to the janitor, played a part in creating an influential piece of science fiction/space opera that will no doubt be examined, studied, and respected for as long as we roam this rock.

The original *Star Wars* film was influenced by so many things that it almost feels hypocritical to start talking about its influence on the world we know. One look at the opening crawl from the 1930s *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe*[78] serials would make any fan stop and wonder just how original the whole phenomenon really is. The problem with trying to debunk the influence of *Star Wars*, including *The Empire Strikes Back*, is that it's just so damn undeniable[79].

It's hard to imagine now, but back in the 1960s and '70s, science-fiction films (with the notable exceptions of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and perhaps *Planet of the Apes*) were largely considered to be pulpy jokes. The first *Star Wars* film was laughed at when Lucas pitched his screenplay. In the minds of many (especially studio executives), sci-fi films were those goofy B-movies from the 1950s featuring weak actors in cheesy alien costumes with big heads, delivering lines of dialogue like, "Take me to your leader." They weren't "serious" films into which a sensible studio would sink money. They were either abstract, hard-to-understand statements about humanity (such as *THX 1138* and *Silent Running*) or they were campy fun (like *Barbarella* and *One Million Years B.C.*). It wasn't until Lucasfilm (and, to be fair, Spielberg) came around and proved that serious money could be made from the seemingly trivial genre that things changed. Then came the bandwagon-riding copycats.

The success of sci-fi films like *Star Wars* (1977), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), and, of course, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) stirred up the Hollywood trend bee's nest. When a certain type of film becomes a hit, studios rush to make

one of their own and cash in. In the 1980s, sci-fi was all the rage. Films like *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *The Black Hole*, *The Last Starfighter*, *Flash Gordon*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, and *Tron*, as well as the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* sequels, dominated movie screens.

No one seemed to mind, but let's talk specifically about *The Empire Strikes Back*. One of the harshest critiques that the film faced at the time of its release was that it had a cliffhanger ending, stopping in the middle of the story – which, of course, was George Lucas's intention.

However, you have to remember that, back then, this was a bold move usually reserved for television's episodic format. Film serials had gone the way of the dodo when TVs became household items. Lucas wanted to bring this nostalgic notion back in a small way, and set everyone up for the final installment of his saga, officially making it a trilogy.

That being said, I can see no bigger influence that *The Empire Strikes Back* has had on the film industry today than the cementing of the modern-day blockbuster trilogy.

These days, trilogies are commonplace. It's natural to want more of a good thing, especially when it makes millions (perhaps billions) of dollars worldwide. In a way, we have *The Empire Strikes Back* to thank (or blame?) for Hollywood's trilogy obsession. There were trilogies before *Star Wars*, of course, but *The Empire Strikes Back*, which led to *Return of the Jedi*, proved that they were not just novelties anymore.

Soon, movie studios would start planning, investing in, and budgeting for multi-picture deals with filmmakers. They'd also be willing to look back at previously successful films to determine if more could be made.

***The Empire Strikes Back* ends on a decidedly dark note, with the bad guys having won. Such cliffhanger endings have greatly influenced modern movie trilogies.**

(Such was the case with Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part III*, for instance. Paramount wanted another film, but Coppola felt that the first two had done the job. *The Godfather* wasn't meant to be a trilogy. But Coppola fell on hard times and eventually caved, later admitting that his decision to make the film had been a purely financial one.[80])

Trilogies nowadays are marketed as such before the first film is even released. Part of the strategy is to prepare viewers for the fact that there's more coming, so that they won't be too disappointed with what they get in the first two installments – and so that they're not left feeling that the story ended abruptly in the middle. There's an understanding that we're building up to something big at the end of it all. *The Hobbit* films are great examples of this, whereas *Back to the Future* only became a trilogy after the first film's success. That little "To be continued…" title card you remember was only added to the VHS (home video) releases to let people know more films were in production.

So while it may be difficult to discern or pinpoint the exact source of the trilogy craze that started in the 1980s, I like to think that George Lucas's nostalgia for those film serials of the 1930s got the ball rolling, and that *The Empire Strikes Back* was a catalyst.

Sins of the Father?

> "…And in the time of greatest despair there shall come a savior, and he shall be known as: THE SON OF THE SUNS." *Journal of the Whills*, 3:127
>
> — from The Star Wars – Episode One – "The Star Wars" (second draft, 28 January, 1975)

To comprehend the impact of something as grandiose as the *Star Wars* saga, you might have to go back and retrace its development. This is partially why Lucas decided to reveal Anakin Skywalker's childhood development to us in the *Star Wars* prequels. He wanted us to fully understand Anakin's character, by establishing that he wasn't always evil. Taking it a step further, Anakin wasn't always Luke's and Leia's father, either. While the general public has been blissfully oblivious to this, it has been the subject of much fan debate.[81]

In the years between the release of the original *Star Wars* trilogy and the prequels, many fans were content with Lucas's explanations that the saga was always intended, at its core, to be about family: namely, a father and a son. A certain faction of fans, however, maintained that Lucas was being disingenuous and trying to rewrite history to match these claims, so that he would appear to have had everything planned out from the start.

As with many debates, the answer seems to lie somewhere in the middle.

When it comes to filmmaking, I'm a firm believer that the finished product represents the final word in telling the story. The choices made and the steps taken that lead a project down certain paths are good to note for historical reasons, but ultimately should be written off as part of the process. *The Empire Strikes Back* may have been the second *Star Wars* film released in theaters, but its development was dependent upon the original movie and the decisions made before anyone knew whether or not it would be successful. We all know how *that* worked out.

One result of creating a successful blockbuster universe, however, is that it will be endlessly picked apart and studied to the last detail by fans ravenous for any bits of information they can find. This is especially true when original drafts of the scripts exist and/or are referenced in published works, like *Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays*.[82]

So on one side, you have those who take Lucas at his word and accept that he knew the whole story from the outset. Let's call this group Lucasites, since, like the leukocytes in a person's immune system, their goal is to protect the "body" of *Star Wars*. These folks fully trust Lucas (even after the prequels) and are happy to ingest any blanket statements he makes concerning the formation of the *Star Wars* saga. They're an easygoing crowd who like their *Star Wars* in a neat package with a little bow on top. They don't really overthink the saga's origin, and are more concerned with the characters and universe in general. They believe whatever Lucas says and don't really care to debate the issue. And there's certainly nothing wrong with that.

On the other side, you have the skeptics. These scrutinizers have poured over the early drafts searching for clues to a puzzle they've mostly created for themselves. They agonize not only over what was written, but *when* it was written. They attempt to pinpoint the dates on which crucial decisions

were made that altered the saga's development. They tend to point out all of the inconsistencies in Lucas's quotes over the years, stopping just short of flat-out calling him a liar.

It's primarily this second group on whom we need to focus, since they are the ones who cause the most stir in fan circles.

So what's the big deal, and what does this have to do with *The Empire Strikes Back*?

Well, it's a popular opinion that one of the greatest plot twists (if not *the* greatest) in cinematic history thus far is Darth Vader's revelation that he is Luke Skywalker's father. This threw many people for a loop back in 1980, because they didn't know whether or not Vader was lying. Luke didn't seem to know for sure either, which helped to make the twist more effective. It wasn't confirmed until three years later, in *Return of the Jedi*, when Yoda and Ben Kenobi hit Luke with a Dagobah double-whammy: not only was Vader really his father, but Leia, on whom he had a crush – and with whom he'd previously made out – was his sister. (I wonder if there's such a thing as psychotherapy in the *Star Wars* universe. Poor Luke.)

So the big question here is: was it always Lucas's intention for Darth Vader to be the father of Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa? The short answer is no… from a certain point of view.

If you ask Lucas, he'll (of course) tell you that *yes*, *Star Wars* was *always* about a father and a son, and that the entire saga (referring to the first six films) was really all about Anakin's journey. The Lucasites swallow this down with a glass of "who cares." The skeptics (and I lean slightly in that direction) call shenanigans, but I'm a bit more pragmatic in my thoughts on the matter.

I believe that Lucas, rather than offering a ridiculously complex explanation about the many paths that *Star Wars* went down during the writing of the first three films every time someone asks him about them, merely wants to keep it simple. When you're creating a universe, what matters most is what ends up on the screen.

Sure, if you read and analyze the original drafts of *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, it becomes painfully obvious that, at some point, Lucas made an executive decision to take certain characters and meld their backstories for the sake of the story. Darth Vader started out as little more than a side villain with no Force powers at all. Those powers belonged to

another character named Prince Valorum. And the character who would eventually be called Anakin Skywalker began as a no-named figure simply referred to as “Father Skywalker.” Lucas played around with so many elements of the story in those early drafts, it’s hard to nail down what his actual intentions were, but there were clearly family themes present from the start. There were always fathers and children – sometimes many, sometimes few.

When it came to writing *Empire*, Lucas had a few problems he had to deal with. He wasn’t pleased with Brackett’s first draft, so he took on the writing duties for a while and really began to think about what he had versus where he wanted to go. Vader had clearly progressed from the minor henchman he was in early drafts of *Star Wars* to an iconic villain. Lucas had introduced us to Luke’s father via dialogue between Ben and Luke in *A New Hope*. He knew he wanted Anakin Skywalker in the new story somehow, but had already established that Vader had betrayed and murdered Anakin years prior. Therefore, he needed to deal with all of this while keeping the story exciting and kinetic.

Without detailing Lucas’s entire process, it’s safe to say he went through a series of machinations that eventually resulted in the combination of Prince Valorum (a Sith from the first drafts of *The Star Wars*), General Vader (originally an Imperial human henchman, neither Sith nor cyborg), and Anakin Skywalker (“Father Skywalker”) into one big super-character: Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith. (Valorum and Vader had already been combined for the first movie, so I’m condensing a bit here, but you get the idea.)

When Brackett turned in her first draft of *The Empire Strikes Back*, the Father Skywalker character appeared to Luke as a ghost, much like Obi-Wan did in the finished film. This character was a separate entity from Darth Vader. Skeptics usually bring this up when challenging one of Lucas’s quotes about Vader’s origin. If Vader was *always* supposed to be Luke’s dad, then why does this Father Skywalker character even exist in the first place?

In *Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays*, Lucas provides an explanation: “I didn’t discuss the notion of Vader being Luke’s father with Leigh Brackett. At that point I wasn’t sure if I was going to include it in that script or reveal it in the third episode. I was going back and forth, and rather

than confuse things for Leigh, I decided to keep the whole issue out of the mix. I figured I would add it later on." While the Lucasites typically accept this explanation, the skeptics usually remain unconvinced, claiming that if this were true, then he couldn't have possibly had it all planned out, as he's keen on telling the press.

Skeptics also like to cite the famous *Rolling Stone* interview Lucas gave in August 1977, in which he mentioned not only Obi-Wan and Vader, but also Luke's father as a separate character.[83] When asked about the next *Star Wars* story, Lucas replied:

> It's about Ben and Luke's father and Vader when they are young Jedi knights. But Vader kills Luke's father, then Ben and Vader have a confrontation, just like they have in *Star Wars*, and Ben almost kills Vader. As a matter of fact, he falls into a volcanic pit and gets fried and is one destroyed being. That's why he has to wear the suit with a mask, because it's a breathing mask. It's like a walking iron lung. His face is all horrible inside. I was going to shoot a close-up of Vader where you could see the inside of his face, but then we said, no, no, it would destroy the mystique of the whole thing.

"I am your father… or am I?" Darth Vader may not have been originally intended to be Luke Skywalker's dad, after all.

So, who's right, when even Lucas has contradicted himself so many times? Well, if you analyze the many screenplay drafts, it's clear that there was a progression. Characters and plots shifted, bringing the film to a better place. You can't really blame Lucas for wanting to condense history a bit. There's also the possibility that with time and age, there comes a certain haziness with regard to memory. I can hardly remember what I had for breakfast yesterday, never mind the exact whos, whats, wheres, and whens of something I wrote 30 years ago, or the exact process that got me there.

Is Lucas intentionally trying to re-write history? Should we care?

My go-to answer is usually “no,” as I don’t think he’s being intentionally disingenuous. I do believe he has been a bit vague with his interview answers at times, but I don’t attribute this to any ill intention on his part. Put yourself in his shoes. After endless years of answering the same questions over and over again, details start to become lost or melded with other details to create a more generic answer that can be provided quickly. It’s simply a good idea to take Lucas’s *Star Wars* backstory quotes with a grain (or two) of salt, or else you might just drive yourself crazy.

Besides, the *process* of making a film like *The Empire Strikes Back* shouldn’t really be scrutinized. Most artistic endeavors follow a twisted path through the woods to completion. To believe that Lucas knew *everything* from the start is not only foolish, but non-representative of the creative process. Ideas beget other ideas, which beget even *more* ideas, and so on. No one gets it right the first time through.

If Lucas were presented with all the evidence that skeptics have compiled regarding what happened and when, contradicting certain quotes he’s made throughout the years, he would likely say, “Hmmm. Yeah, that’s probably right,” and shrug it off. Maybe we should, too. Sure, things changed. Vader wasn’t always the twins’ father (in fact, they weren’t always twins, given their different ages in early script drafts), but the theme of family was always existent. Han Solo was once a green alien. Luke was female at one point. The name “Starkiller” was used in lieu of “Skywalker” in many drafts.

It’s patently obvious that Lucas didn’t have all the details in place, or else there would have been one script and one script only. So while we all should appreciate and respect fan enthusiasm in trying to keep the facts straight, let’s cut Uncle George some slack. Without him, we wouldn’t have this enormous playground in which to frolic that not only made him and his employees a lot of money, but allowed countless others to profit from it as well – both monetarily and otherwise.

Empire’s Endurance

A film like *The Empire Strikes Back* is what many people consider a near-perfect cinematic experience. It’s not something that can be discussed in one, 21, 51, 101, or any number of pages. It’s about the feeling or vibe

you get when you watch it. It's an experience, and a rare one at that. To dismiss it as "just a movie" is an extreme oversimplification.

Generations of filmmakers have been influenced by (and have had their works compared to) *Empire*. I can't think of one person I've ever met who didn't enjoy it, and I have never heard anyone comment, "*The Empire Strikes Back*? What a piece of junk!"[84] It endures and always will.

To this day, whenever I walk by the television and *Empire* happens to be on the screen, I have to stop in my tracks and pay attention. There are very few films that can do that to me. It has a certain hypnotic power over me that I can't explain. When I see it, I'm instantly transported back to the Totowa Cinema in northern New Jersey (1966–1993, R.I.P.) – a theater I had to be driven to by an adult, which only sported two screens, and where tickets cost somewhere around $3.50 apiece. These days, it's just another generic retail clothing store. It breaks my heart every time I pass it on the highway.

It reminds me that many life-changing events occurred within the confines of movie theaters back in those days. Today? Not so much. I don't get the same experience going to the movies. Sure, the screens are bigger and the sound is better, but I can't recall being *moved* in a theater during the last few decades the way I was when I was a kid.

Is it age? Maybe. Is it the formulaic quality of today's mainstream movies? It could be (though there were plenty back then, too). Is it that the focus now seems to be more on making a fast buck than on the art of telling a story? That's could be part of it also.

Whatever the reasons, one fact remains: *The Empire Strikes Back* not only passed the test of time, but did so with flying colors. It was the perfect storm of art, filmmaking, storytelling, technology, writing, emotion, fantasy, adventure, action, acting, humor, and yes, even humanity, the likes of which we may never see again. George Lucas successfully created a brand-new universe in which a film like *Empire* could connect with people of *all* ages on many levels, long before Pixar (originally a Lucasfilm creation, by the way) perfected the process.

You could enjoy it on the surface, or you could dig deeper and find all sorts of hidden treasures buried in its subtext. I've seen the film countless times and yet, every once in a while, I still catch something I never noticed, and nothing makes me smile wider.

So the next time you sit down to watch *The Empire Strikes Back*, put on your Indiana Jones fedora and do some exploring. Listen to the dialogue. Look at things in the background. Watch the characters' eyes. Don't think – feel. Use your instincts, as Yoda might say. You might be surprised at what you'll find.

Changes, Choices, and Compromise: Revisiting *Return of the Jedi*

by Joe Bongiorno

> I hate compromise. It really depresses me.
>
> —George Lucas[85]

For those who love the *Star Wars* saga, the films were more than just summer blockbusters. *Star Wars* was mythic. *2001: A Space Odyssey* had presented a realistic science-fiction story, but it was too slow and cerebral for most; *Silent Running* was striking, but its execution failed to live up to its premise; the closest contender would be *Planet of the Apes* and its sequels, but the narrative limited where it could go after the second film, and an ever-decreasing budget rendered its sequels less and less impressive.

What George Lucas and his collaborators created on film was an entire *universe*, an authentic otherworld, a kind of galactic Oz or Middle-earth, sprawling with strange beings and exotic locales, ruled by a totalitarian regime of terrifying and fascinating villains who were opposed by an idealistic group of freedom fighters, including a princess, a rogue, a farm boy, and a knight with mystical powers. Lucas may have borrowed from a wealth of film, television, and literary sources, but he coalesced them in ways that made the worlds and characters appear organic, diverse, and full of endless potential. *Star Wars* was an extraordinary achievement, grand and epic, but also personal, grounded, and moving, a depiction of fantasy and science fiction that was wholly real, seductive, and powerful in ways that had never before been realized on screen.

Yet of the three original *Star Wars* films, one receives a considerable share of vitriol from fans and critics alike: the third installment, *Return of*

the Jedi. For some, *Jedi* is a favorite, an upbeat and triumphal affair that successfully does what is asked of it. For others, it remains deeply disappointing, and the start of a trend that would see potentially excellent *Star Wars* films sacrificed on the altar of commercialism, compromise, and concession.

Because *Jedi* is so intrinsically tied to its predecessors, particularly its immediate precursor, *The Empire Strikes Back*, one cannot assess *Episode VI* without considering and comparing them. *Empire* is a film that, for years, has been considered not only the best of the *Star Wars* films, but one of the greatest films, period. *Empire Magazine*'s 2015 list of "The 301 Greatest Movies of All Time," as voted by the public, ranked *Empire* as the greatest film ever made.[86] Such accolades reflect the abiding love moviegoers have for the film, a devotion that is bound to affect how one views its successor.

Return of the Jedi's supporters charge that fans had unrealistic expectations for the film, built up over the three-year wait, with unrealized assumptions of what it would be, and there is certainly merit to this viewpoint, particularly as speculation for the final film of the series ran wild, and the tone *Empire* set was so grave. Yet, *The Empire Strikes Back* also had expectations riding on it, and it's difficult to simply disregard the comments made by members of the cast and crew, who expressed disappointment regarding certain choices made on the film. Harrison Ford derided the ending, Carrie Fisher considered it the weakest of the films, and Mark Hamill felt he couldn't relate to it.

It's of interest to examine what factors led to the disappointment that some feel about this film, which 30 years later is still discussed and debated. Is it simply a matter of Ewoks and a generational divide? Or is the film as weak as some claim – and, if so, why? A look at its conception, early drafts, and cut scenes help to show the ways in which *Return of the Jedi* struggled almost from the start, how certain decisions and circumstances resulted in the final film, and how it might yet be strengthened in ways Lucas himself conceived.

Always in Motion the Future Is…

By the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*, fans were left with an array of mysteries and speculation. Who was the “other” of which Yoda spoke? How did the mysterious Boba Fett factor into things? What role would the Emperor play? Would Han Solo be freed? Was Darth Vader actually Luke Skywalker’s father? Who would Princess Leia end up with?

At the time, it was believed that *Return of the Jedi* would be the third movie of the middle trilogy of a nine-film saga. There had even been speculation about a possible twelve films, but nine was the most commonly touted.

Episodes I to *III* would reveal the story of young Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin Skywalker's love affair with Queen Padmé Amidala, Senator Palpatine's rise to emperor, and the book-ends of the Clone Wars. *Episodes VII* to *IX* were much more mysterious, though early concepts reveal that it would have delved into Luke’s life as a Jedi, a potential romance for him, the story of the “other” from across the galaxy (who would have been his sister, but not Leia), and the final defeat of the Emperor (who would not have died in *Episode VI*).

One big difference in early drafts of *Episode VI* was that Emperor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid) was originally intended to survive and become a major player in the then-planned *Episodes VII* to *IX*, with his defeat being the climax of the series.

Directing *Star Wars* had, according to Lucas, nearly killed him, and so he envisioned other directors taking the helm for the remaining episodes except for the last:

> What I want to do is direct the last sequel. I could do the first one and the last one and let everyone else do the ones in between… I'm hoping if I get friends of mine they will want to do a much better film, like, 'I'll show George that I can do a film twice that good,' and I think they can, but then I want to do the last one, so I can do one twice as good as everybody else.[87]

This went as far as *Empire*, when Lucas discovered he was having difficulty letting others play in the sandbox. This was, in part, because he was now getting bank loans to fund the films, but also because he was anxious to create Skywalker Ranch to serve as a kind of haven for independent filmmakers, like Lucas, to conceptualize the types of non-commercial films in which Hollywood wasn't interested. The Ranch would require an excess of $20 million, above and beyond what was needed to pay back the bank, give Fox their share, finance his new companies and subsidiaries, and allow for personal profit. Another difficulty to handing the reins over to others was the fact that he hadn't yet hammered out the larger storyline.[88]

This was impeded by the fact that Lucas hated the writing process, which he found to be tedious and painful. He'd had a lot of help on his *Star Wars* screenplay, which ended up receiving contributions from his wife, Marcia Lucas, as well as Gary Kurtz, Bill Huyck, Gloria Katz, John Milius, and Francis Ford Coppola. These collaborators allowed him to create an outline for the larger saga that worked for him, and which could be improvised and updated in smaller ways as the films were being made. Yet with Lucas now in the process of empire-building, overseeing the development of numerous enterprises, time was no longer a commodity he had.

When the reality of making such large films the way he wanted set in, the idea of embarking on yet another trilogy, let alone two more trilogies, proved far too daunting, exhausting, and detrimental to the family life Lucas sought to finally have. So, the prequel trilogy was something that would be pushed off, revisited perhaps five years or so down the road, once the effects had become more advanced and less expensive. *Return of the Jedi* was also conceptually altered so that it would become the final chapter, with the mysteries raised in the two prior installments resolved in not four, but one movie.

Lucas had long said the conceptual origin of *Star Wars* was tied into his desire to make a modern fairy tale. He also expressed an interest in

exploring the idea of a primitive force overthrowing a technological behemoth. Lucas and producer Gary Kurtz (who had produced *American Graffiti*, *Star Wars*, and *The Empire Strikes Back)* had originally been geared to tackle that idea directly in *Apocalypse Now*, a film that ultimately went to Lucas's friend Coppola. So they would repurpose the concept thematically in *Return of the Jedi*.

Yet, when the time came to begin production on that film, several factors arose to compete with its basic premise. The first was Lucas's insistence that the movie be lighter-hearted and more uplifting than its forebear. The second was the need to not go over-schedule or over-budget, as *Empire* had. These dynamics would continually undermine the narrative in ways large and small throughout *Jedi*'s production.

The Emperor Is Not as Forgiving as I Am

The first major change to what was then called *Revenge of the Jedi* involved its producer. Kurtz had envisioned *Jedi* as being a tonally closer companion-piece to *Empire*:

> The original story outline that we had for the third film… was darker and it ended up with Luke riding off into the sunset, metaphorically, on his own. And that would have been a bittersweet ending but I think it would have been dramatically stronger… One of the discussions was about Han Solo's character being killed in one of the raids in the middle of the story. Harrison wanted it to be that way. He wanted his character to end that way. So there was that and there was the princess having to take control of what's left of her people, and be crowned queen.[89]

A major impediment to that concept was Kenner and the marketing people at Fox, who were not keen on any character deaths which might impede repeat ticket and toy sales. "It's a shame," Kurtz opined. "They make three times as much on toys as they do on films. It's natural to make decisions that protect the toy business, but that's not the best thing for making quality films."[90]

Lucas holds a different perspective: "People tend to look at merchandising as an evil thing. But ultimately, a lot of fun things come out of it, and at the same time, it pays for the overhead of the company and everybody's salary."[91] There is something to be said for this. Many adults who now complain about the concession to commercial factors had gleefully purchased action figures and toys as kids and young adults (and many still do). It's also salient to note that even though Lucas is interested

and invested in experimental films, his personal sensibilities include a love of big, loud action movies with lots of spectacle.

But there was more to it than that. Lucas had gone through a psychological shift in his approach to American audiences and, by the end of his time with Steven Spielberg on *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, had come to the conclusion that moviegoers really were more interested in "the rollercoaster ride" aspects of a film than the story, spectacle more than substance. As someone who still held fond memories of the tawdry serials like *Flash Gordon* that he'd grown up with in Modesto, he understood this. But it changed his approach to *Star Wars*. As much as he was personally invested in the films, they had become more important to him as a vehicle to help him fund his dream, the construction of Skywalker Ranch, which he thought would free him from the Hollywood system. Lucas told Lucasfilm's then-president, Charles Weber, "The Ranch is the only thing that counts. That's what everybody is working for."[92]

For Kurtz, however, making a great film was paramount to ensuring a blockbuster that would fund Lucas's dream Ranch, and he assisted director Irvin Kershner in making *The Empire Strikes Back* "a lot better than I wanted to make it."[93] Lucas felt he "could have made just as much money if the film hadn't been quite so good,"[94] an indication that even as far back as 1979, he was less interested in the film's artistic merits as he was in getting the money to bring the Ranch to fruition. It's also an indication that going into it, Lucas knew *Return of the Jedi* would be lesser in quality compared to his first two films, but that it didn't matter so long as it stayed under-budget and offered sufficient spectacle to keep audiences coming back for more.

Despite the partnership they had successfully enjoyed since 1972, Lucas and Kurtz were now at loggerheads. Lucas blamed him for *Empire* going over-schedule and over-budget, and for defending Kershner's choice to make a better film instead of "reining him in." According to Kurtz, "George had it in his mind that he could direct the film remotely by telling [Irvin] Kershner what to do, and Kersh was not that kind of director. George only came over [to London] a few times during the shooting; Kersh said, 'Look, you hired me to make this movie. I'm going to make it.' And he did. He was a bit slow sometimes, and we did have to use a second unit a couple of

times. I directed the second unit after John Barry died suddenly in the first week. So that threw us."[95]

Lucas may have also failed to take into consideration additional factors that contributed to the production running over-schedule. These included Mark Hamill spraining his wrist, as well as Norway (where they shot the Hoth scenes) experiencing the worst blizzard in nearly half a century.

With Kurtz's absence on *Return of the Jedi*, Lucas lost not only a producer, but a story contributor, a second-unit director, and a creative force whose overall sensibilities were generally beneficial.[96] Kurtz was not the only one to go. Lucasfilm was moving to Northern California, but only half of its employees were going with it. "We were very close," Weber said of the team at that time, "so it was like breaking up a family."[97]

According to new producer Howard Kazanjian, there were several individuals at Lucasfilm who were not pulling their weight, and the fat had to be trimmed. Lucas then fired Weber. As per Robert Greber, the company's new president, Weber sought to diversify the films' profits, which was the original plan, but Lucas was now single-mindedly concerned with the construction of Skywalker Ranch.

With a new producer, a new president, and half of Lucasfilm's staff gone, *Return of the Jedi* was headed along a different trajectory even before production of the film got underway. Then there was another blow: the departure of conceptual designer and illustrator Ralph McQuarrie.

A key figure in creating the overall look of *Star Wars* and *Empire*, McQuarrie had designed Darth Vader, R2-D2, C-3PO, Chewbacca, the stormtroopers, lightsabers, X-wing fighters, TIE fighters, and other iconic images. But on *Jedi*, McQuarrie was losing enthusiasm. Once he realized that Lucas had decided to turn the feral Ewok natives into teddy bears, he refused to contribute designs, finding their obvious marketability deplorable. He was also feeling superfluous in the wake of younger designers like Joe Johnston and Nilo Rodis-Jamero, burned out by all the pressure. According to Rinzler, an unnamed close friend claimed McQuarrie was upset over the jealousy of some in the art department. After contributing only 300 sketches and 18 paintings, McQuarrie left.

What Is Thy Bidding, My Master?

The next major step in the production was to find a new director. Lucas didn't want to incur all the stress that doing it himself would entail, but he also knew he couldn't "remote-direct" again, as that hadn't worked with Kershner. He'd need to be on set. Because of *Empire*'s success, there appears to have been initial talk of getting Kershner back, but several impediments prevented that, including the fact that Kershner had been fined by the Directors Guild of America (DGA). Up until this point, directors had their names appear at the beginning of a film. Kershner's came at the end, while Lucasfilm's logo appeared at the head – a fine of $25,000 that Lucas himself paid. Kersner (and ultimately Lucas) would be faced with the same situation again if he directed. Kershner also didn't like the script, and there's little doubt that he wouldn't have tolerated being hamstrung by Lucas and Kazanjian for the next two years. Spielberg expressed interested in directing, but he was also a DGA member and thus couldn't be considered.

This led to Lucas looking outside the United States and the DGA for a new director. Kazanjian weeded out from the large list of potentials Richard Donner, Terry Gilliam, Richard Attenborough, John Carpenter, David Cronenberg, John Boorman, and Joe Dante. Kazanjian's requirements: *Did he come in on budget on the films he made? Did he even care about the budget?* For Lucas, what mattered was finding someone with whom he could get along, who would understand what his role as producer entailed, and who would be willing to work in that capacity. Their first choice for director was David Lynch, who accepted, and then declined three days later.

Lynch later claimed to have gotten a headache when he saw the Ewok sketches, but he was also being wooed by Dino De Laurentiis to make *Dune*, a project that would allow him considerably more creative freedom. Given his sensibilities, it seems unlikely that Lynch would have wanted to be answerable to a producer, and Lucas would not have felt comfortable having to curtail yet another visionary. Not surprisingly, Kazanjian cited the need for someone young, flexible, and unestablished.

This created a Catch-22. Lucas didn't want to direct himself, yet his insistence on a director who was inexperienced guaranteed that whoever they hired would be in over his head and couldn't be trusted to do his job, thereby forcing Lucas to direct anyway. *Empire's* success proved there was precedent for hiring and trusting a more experienced director, but Lucas

wanted the control back in his hands, and intended to be a constant presence on set.

Welsh director Richard Marquand was ultimately chosen. Marquand had few credits to his name, and Lucas claimed to like the clean and tight style of his film *Eye of the Needle*. Marquand had done some documentaries, *Birth of the Beatles* and *Search for the Nile*, as well as a horror film that had been hamstrung by studio interference. In his personal life, he'd joined the Royal Air Force in order to go to Hong Kong and study Chinese, ended up under house arrest in Uganda, and marched with the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma, Alabama. Now he would helm the most anticipated film of all time.

Despite the fact that Paul Hirsch, Marcia Lucas, and Richard Chew had won an Academy Award for *Star Wars*, Marquand insisted on bringing in his own editor, Sean Barton, as well as his own cameraman and team. Kazanjian was against this, as he was concerned about breaking the continuity of the first two films. Lucas conceded to Marquand out of professional respect, but knew he'd ultimately have final say over the cut, and to ensure that, he insisted on Marquand shooting multi-camera.

This did not go over well with Barton, and even the congenial Marquand chafed. Most directors have their shots already worked out and storyboarded beforehand. Multi-camera shooting impedes that process, forcing the cameramen to painstakingly block each multi-angle shot so that they're not getting the other cameras in the frame. But it provides a lot of coverage so that a director has numerous options from which to choose for any given scene, eliminating any worry that if a shot doesn't work, he'll have to reconstruct a set already torn down. It is considerably more time-consuming – something to which Lucas would normally object – but this documentary-style shooting was Lucas's preferred approach, since it insured that he'd have enough coverage to construct the film in the editing room. But for Marquand, the unspoken message was that Lucas didn't trust his directorial vision.

To assuage him, Lucas made small concessions in other areas and verbally attempted to assure Marquand that he was, in fact, the director, but this was belied by Lucas's regular input on matters great and small, causing him to be seen as a kind of over-director, confusing the cast and crew. It was a giant production and Marquand knew he needed Lucas's help, but the

contravening of choices he thought he'd be allowed to make put him in the uncomfortable position of having to play the role of director while knowing Lucas was really the one calling the shots. Most directors would have balked, but to Marquand's credit, he soldiered on, allowing whatever style, approach, and artistic touch he possessed as a craftsman to be compromised and condensed. Marquand later compared it to being a conductor of an orchestra with the composer always around making suggestions.

I Feel the Conflict Within You

For many *Star Wars* fans, there is no doubt that the idea of killing off Han Solo is a disagreeable one, and Luke walking off into the sunset is only appealing if the audience is going to see him again in the next installment. So, even if it's felt he went too far in the other direction, Lucas's choice to change the story to something less depressing is generally met with approval, and his early drafts have much to recommend them.

Without Kurtz onboard, Lucas needed someone to bounce ideas off and tighten the narrative, and thus called back Lawrence Kasdan, who'd written the screenplay for *The Empire Strikes Back*. Marquand was new to the universe, learning as he went along, responding positively to the ideas that Lucas and Kasdan brought forth and debated, and throwing in his own thoughts, some of which were quite good.

According to *The Making of Return of the Jedi* author Jonathan Rinzler, the rough draft "differs and in some ways excels" that of the final film in areas that were more "logical" and "varied."[98] The new locations included Sicemon, a grassy planet that would have housed the Rebel base, and which would have featured either flying whales, giant wasps, or giant birds that served as taxis (McQuarrie produced some wonderful illustrations of these). Then there is the Imperial homeworld of Had Abaddon, which has since been realized in first the Expanded Universe and then the prequel trilogy as Coruscant, with its towering buildings and sprawling cities, which also would have included the Emperor's underground volcanic lair. Had Abaddon's green moon, Tarasand, which later became Jus Endor and then simply Endor, was the destination where Leia would lead a strike team to destroy the communications and shield generator of *two* orbiting Death Stars.

Not just background elements and color, these settings would have helped to establish *Jedi* as another uniquely visual experience alongside the first two films, rather than a retread of what had come before. Had Abaddon was a problem, however, and not just for budgetary reasons. The idea was to have Luke and/or the Rebels destroy the Imperial homeworld. This created an unpleasant parallel of the Empire destroying Alderaan, which would have worked well if the intention were to show the real-world nature of revolutions and how the Alliance had fallen into the same pattern as the Empire. Without a sequel trilogy to follow up on the story, however, Lucas needed to keep the Alliance as the good guys, and couldn't get away with having them destroy a planet, not even an Imperial planet.

Return of the Jedi was condensed to three main settings, two of which had appeared before, Tatooine and Dagobah, and one new setting, Endor's Forest Moon. Lucas later created a more visually interesting Endor in *The Ewok Adventure: Caravan of Courage* and *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor*, but in *Return of the Jedi*, there's nothing much distinguishing it from what one might see in the pages of a *National Geographic*: tall California redwoods and a few elevated huts. It was a cost-saving set, and the film looks it.

Unfortunately, every other setting in the movie comprises ship interiors or Jabba's palace interiors, none of which are visually striking. Dagobah appears again, but just enough to show us Yoda's hut. Lucas said he'd run out of environments and could only come up with giant Sequoias, an environment that was originally conceived for the Wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk. A Wookiee planet, as most fans seem to agree, would have made for a more exciting film, but once again, budget reared its ugly head, and Lucas put forth the justification that Wookiees were too advanced to fit with his concept of natives overthrowing a technologically superior force.

Lucas acknowledged that some of the ideas in the film sounded redundant, but was content to retread not only settings but plots. Marquand considered the trilogy as a kind of symphony in which certain motifs were reprised rather than a strict sequel. One such motif that returned was the attack on the Death Star. In the early drafts, two Death Stars were in construction around the moon orbiting Had Abaddon, and while one could argue that two is no less redundant than one, two *are* more visually arresting. What's more, from a story perspective, the proliferation of

superweapons advances the Emperor's plans from *A New Hope* and further underscores the theme of militarism.

***Return of the Jedi* was originally supposed to feature the Wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk (seen above in *Revenge of the Sith*), but that was ultimately replaced with Ewoks on the Forest Moon of Endor.**

The Emperor is a major player in every version of the script, but he's joined by Grand Moff Jerjerrod in the earlier ones – and unlike his film namesake, he is a powerful figure in the Imperial hierarchy, someone who taunts Vader with the Emperor's plans to abduct and train Luke. Unlike his tolerance of Tarkin, however, Vader murders Jerjerrod when he goes too far, pushing the Dark Lord on a kind of revolutionary trajectory that sees him defy the Emperor to insure his son's survival. It would have worked well with three more films to follow, which could then have developed the Emperor's character, but with *Jedi* being the last entry in Lucas's saga, much of this role was more sagaciously given to the Emperor himself. Jerjerrod wasn't eliminated, but was downgraded to a cameo, unfortunately,

as his deleted scenes are fascinating and, in one instance, pivotal, as will be discussed below.

As with Kurtz, Kasdan is often discussed as being the long-suffering genius whom Lucas chose to ignore at his own peril, but a look at their recorded story sessions in *The Making of Return of the Jedi* reveals Kasdan also overlooked plot holes and story beats that needed attention. Much focus is on the Luke-Vader-Emperor climax, as well as on how to reconcile Lucas's desire for a lighter, more upbeat film with Kasdan's for a more realistic one. It's likely they could have achieved a better balance, but with story sessions occurring so late in the process, there wasn't enough time for their ideas to marinate and settle in order for them to see what worked, what didn't, and how to fix the latter.

Both men recognized that there's no story for Han or Leia, yet failed to address it in the script or on film. Both realized that the camaraderie between the main cast was by and large absent, but Kasdan added only one tender reunion scene with snappy dialogue (the sandstorm scene), which Lucas later excised in the final cut. The two men discussed the pivotal conflict at the film's climax, but neither found the solution to the anemic ground battle.

Ironically, in softening the film's tone to such a degree that the battles are bloodless affairs, Lucas inadvertently sanitized war, making it appear as if it's all fun and games. It's worth noting that the fault does not lie entirely with Lucas, as many often assert. In fact, according to Rinzler, Lucas's later rewrite of Kasdan's script "improved and deepened dialogue, motivation and logistics." Yet, major problems remained in the screenplay that needed to be addressed before filming began.

Short Help Is Better Than No Help at All

As production went into full swing, Lucas's desire for a fun, more lighthearted film began to manifest in the special-effects department as well. The big opening set piece would take place in Jabba the Hutt's palace. Mentioned only in *Star Wars*, Jabba was known as a dangerous gangster, and *Jedi's* opening crawl calls him "vile." In accordance, special-effects gurus Phil Tippet and Stuart Freeborn produced the wonderfully grotesque slug-like crime lord, along with a host of creatures for his lair. Tippet noted

his preference for “fun monsters… annoying little gremlins, stupid monsters… we had a tendency to like softer, cuter types, funnier type things rather than the morbid or the horrific or the too grotesque.”[99]

Thankfully, they’re never *too* soft, cute, or funny (though they are excessively hidden in shadow much of the time). That would be saved for the film’s third act, when the much-maligned Ewoks were brought in.

Kasdan felt the lovable space-bears didn’t work. Lucas admitted they were tricky, but there was no time to rewrite the entire second and third acts – and besides, he wanted them. “George loved them,” remarked second-unit director Roger Christian. “Nobody else did.”[100]

Visual effects Oscar winner Richard Edlund bemoaned, “We all hated the Ewoks.” They were put together so quickly, he added, that “you could see the zipper seams at the back.”[101]

Mark Hamill expressed reservations as well. “I did tell George I thought the Ewoks were too cute,” he said, “that they should be more feral and rat-like.”[102] His suggestion has merit. The original *Star Wars* boasted several creatures from the cantina that could have fit the bill, such as Ranats, who could be cute and endearing, but also believably fierce.

Critics and fans accused Lucas of selling out and caring only about marketing teddy bears, but Lucas – who openly acknowledged that he wanted an Ewok for his daughter – contends this was untrue:

> A lot of people are going to be offended by Ewoks. A lot of people say the films are just an excuse for merchandising: ‘Lucas decided to cash in on the teddy bear.’ Well, it’s not a great thing to cash in on, because there are lots of teddy bears marketed, so you don’t have anything that’s unique. If I were designing something original as a market item, I could do a lot better.[103]

A more accurate assessment may be that he created the Ewoks to have something for his daughter to enjoy in *Star Wars*. But when he could just as easily go out and make children’s films and TV movies – which he did with the two Ewok telefilms (which he said were a gift for his daughter) and the two animated series, *Ewoks* and *Droids* – it seems odd to have risked the integrity of the third part of an otherwise serious space-fantasy series with elements that were bound to alienate some of its fans. “It was very difficult to get the Ewoks to really seem threatening,” Lucas acknowledged. “They’re designed to be cute and fuzzy, virtual teddy bears; but they’re also the ones who save the day, so they had to have this dual capacity. I knew the

older kids would have trouble buying into this idea, but we decided to do it anyway."[104]

It is difficult to comprehend how "a legion of" the Emperor's "best troops" would fall before sticks and stones, particularly with only one casualty on the heroes' side. Lucas's decision to employ "virtual teddy bears" as the main fighting force cornered him into a position from which he couldn't successfully depict any kind of authentic battle. He couldn't show them being blown into bloody bits, nor causing mortal injury to stormtroopers, a more brutal depiction. There is some hint at this with the Ewoks using stormtrooper helmets as percussion instruments, as well as in their seeming intent on barbecuing the Rebels, but it's ambivalent as they never threaten Leia, and both of Lucas's later *Ewok* films suggest that eating humans is just not something they do.[105]

Lucas explained that it was never about *defeating* the Empire at Endor. The Ewoks merely needed to *distract* them long enough for the Rebels to get the shield generator open. This would explain the lack of broken and bloodied stormtrooper bodies, if not the lack of broken and bloodied Ewok corpses.

I Am Here to Put You Back on Schedule

Coming off *Poltergeist*, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn*, and *Empire*, the team at ILM were physically and mentally exhausted, and *Return of the Jedi* would prove their most difficult assignment. Several shots had to be completely redone in post-production. Lucas also began eliminating key effects shots from the final battle and, to the frustration of producer Kazanjian and visual effects coordinator Ken Ralston, the loss of $250,000 worth of shots and months of work. "George made a drastic cut on the film, a horrible, horrible, drastic cut,"[106] Ralston said, throwing out between 70 and 80 shots while requesting numerous new shots, what amounted to 2,200 new storyboards. Although Lucas restored some of the excised shots, the crew had only weeks to deliver more than a hundred new shots, and it had taken then six months to do the first 400!

Lucas was becoming draconian in true imperial fashion. After he told one ILM designer that a shot which had taken 27 hours to complete was "good enough," the designer took it upon himself to perfect it anyway.

When Lucas discovered the perfected shot, he declared, in retribution, that he wouldn't use it. "*Jedi* almost killed everybody," Lucas recalled, "every department, from costumes to monsters to… the special effects. Everything was very, very hard on everybody."[107]

Marquand's and Barton's first cut was reportedly difficult to sit through. This is not atypical for initial cuts of Lucas's films. Traditional directors like Spielberg shoot their movies as they envision them and then cut accordingly, whereas Lucas creates a film in the editing room, using that process to construct the story. Marquand, very much a traditional director, knew this was coming and left for a long-deserved vacation. With *Empire*, Lucas's tried-and-true method had failed to work and he'd been forced to re-edit the film in accordance with Kershner's direction (which was not shot to be a rollercoaster ride). This time, he thought, he would do it his way.

This would prove to be the most difficult trial of the entire production. Marcia Lucas, his wife and editing partner, filed for divorce. She had been Lucas's "secret weapon," according to biographer Dale Pollock, "indispensable to Lucas because she compensates for his deficiencies. Where George is not unduly concerned with character and lacks faith in an audience's patience, Marcia figures out how a movie can be made warner, how the character can be given depth and resonance." Her suggestions were "among the few Lucas took seriously."[108] Numerous character moments in *Star Wars* and *Empire* exist solely because of her. Yet the years of frustration with a workaholic husband and no end in sight had led her to fall in love with someone who was more emotionally available (an art designer working for Skywalker Ranch).

"It was very, very hard," Lucas stated. "I was going through this huge emotional turmoil through most of the post-production, and was barely standing. It was an act of great energy just to get up in the morning and go to work. I was so, so depressed."[109] Marcia was committed to doing her job in editorial, but this created tension, as each had a different idea of how the final edit should proceed. *Return of the Jedi* suffered as a result. Their hearts weren't it in, and several significant cuts and decisions were made at this time that severely hampered and hurt the film.

You Have Paid the Price for Your Lack of Vision!

Lucas turned out to be right about American audiences' love of spectacle, and *Return of the Jedi* went on to gross more than $475 million worldwide, with an even higher domestic gross than *The Empire Strikes Back*, succeeding expectations and allowing him to complete his dream of building Skywalker Ranch. Yet, Marcia recalled, "by the time George could afford to have a film facility, he no longer wanted to direct."[110]

In the end, Lucas got his blockbuster, but lost his wife and half his fortune, and the dream of Skywalker Ranch collapsed:

> Its facilities were so state-of-the-art and expensive that none but the biggest Hollywood blockbusters could use it – exactly the type of productions that Lucas claimed the facility was built to dethrone. Its lavish library… went virtually unused and no indie filmmaking paradise ever sprouted. In the end, Skywalker Ranch turned into the $20 million Lucasfilm office, and from it ruled George Lucas, alone and without purpose.[111]

Lamented George Lucas:

> Nothing is for free. There's a price for everything… Because the price, unfortunately, isn't in money. It's in your soul. I definitely would give back the success or trade it, if it hadn't been for the joy that some people have gotten from *Star Wars*… That part is worth whatever I had to pay.[112]

If its most ardent fans reveled in *Jedi*, its harshest critics charged that Lucas had created a pallid, prosaic, and disappointing cartoon to drive product placement, evidence that he didn't need Hollywood to thwart his vision since he was perfectly capable of doing that himself.

Perhaps the more interesting story lies behind the scenes, with the on-screen tragedy of Darth Vader being an echo of a man who chose to become Hollywood in order to escape it, and who paid the price for doing so. Of all his films, *Return of the Jedi* seems the most driven by Lucas's personal demons. We can see this in his inability to trust his directors, his obsession with the notion that the film had to be commercial, his misguided attempt to do so by forcing incongruous childish elements into the film, and his fear that he'd fail to finish Skywalker Ranch and free himself from Hollywood control, exacerbated by inexorable stress and exhaustion from working a grueling schedule trying to build an empire.

In the end, it got to be *too* much. Lucas was simply unable to discern what *Return of the Jedi* needed to be and, rather than maintaining the integrity of the story first and foremost, sought what he thought was a surefire way to achieve a blockbuster (a mistake he unfortunately failed to learn, as he repeated it years later on *The Phantom Menace*).

Marcia described him, at this time, as “very emotionally blocked, incapable of sharing feelings.”[113] In the end, she “just couldn’t stand the darkness any longer.”[114] Ironically, Lucas was finally able to take a long rest and be the husband and father that, up until then, he’d failed to be:

> I’m more and more unhappy, and tired and exhausted and dragging home endless problems at the end of the day. I’m not having much fun. It’s all work. It’s very anxiety-ridden, very hard, very frustrating and relentless. The extent to which one’s personal life is usurped cannot be overestimated. It has made me less of a happy person than I think I could be. It has disrupted my family life. I have a wife and a two-year-old daughter, and they are the most important things in my life […] *Star Wars* has dominated my life, sort of grabbed it and taken it over against my will. I’ve got to get my life back again before it’s too late. The sacrifices that had to make it this point are greater than what I wanted to make, ultimately. [115]

It would prove too little too late for the marriage and family life he so desired to get back to. Lucas would later explore this paradox in the prequel trilogy through the character of Anakin Skywalker – who, like Lucas, brings about his own self-destruction by his need to control everything, and the fear that if he doesn’t, others will ruin what he’s been building.

This Can’t Be, Artoo! You’re Playing the Wrong Message!

Return of the Jedi emerged as an entertaining but atonal film, neither as visually stunning or powerful as *Empire*, nor as wondrous and enchanting as *A New Hope*. Its pacing is inelegant and too fast-moving, reducing its once-engaging characters to two-dimensional cutouts who move and shout a lot, but have little to say.

Despite some pacing and staging problems (the latter after Han is brought out of carbonite), the first act with its array of monsters is quite good, as is Luke’s ominous entrance, which seems to suggest his moral ambiguity. Yet, save for the rescue of Han Solo, the lengthy first act has no narrative connection to the remainder of the film. And as much as we all love Han, there’s little point in saving him (from a screenplay perspective) if he’s given nothing significant to do for the remainder of the movie.

Designers Phil Tippett and Stuart Freeborn stand amidst the various creatures in Jabba's palace, which serve as some of the highlights of *Return of the Jedi*.

The second act is, in large part, a meandering set-up to the lackluster Endor battle of the third act. Critics are correct in noting that it lacks dramatic tension. In its place is forced humor, one-liners and Ewok slapstick. The Ewoks are legitimately cute, but they're not a credible threat. Lucas's response to this was to use AT-STs, ungainly "chicken-walkers," which crumbled at the sight of a falling log. Instead of ramping up the threat, as he did for the Battle of Hoth, Lucas softened it to allow for his Ewoks to function, and in the process destroyed the film's credibility.

That is, until the final act aboard the second Death Star. Nearly everything involving Luke, Vader, and the Emperor is well crafted, and it culminates in the most significant moments of the entire trilogy: Luke's refusal to commit violence against his father, an act of self-sacrifice that's then echoed by Vader's self-sacrifice, which serves to protect Luke from the Emperor and eliminate the Empire. It is a stunning ending that upends everything that has come before, with a profound lesson in the power of love, forgiveness, and nonviolent resistance in action. It's so good it almost seems to belong to another film.

Comparing *Jedi* to *Empire*, it becomes apparent that what suffered the most were the characters. Though his death provides much-needed heft, Yoda does little but confirm Luke's parentage and set up a plot that never plays out, telling Luke to "pass on" what he has learned (which does, at

least, come to fruition in the Expanded Universe). Obi-Wan fares no better, as Alec Guinness labors to tie up story points and provide justification for the deception that Ben told Luke in *Star Wars*. The role of the Jedi in the earlier treatments is more fascinating and involved, as they share metaphysical discussions and eventually leave their ghost forms behind, reincarnating in the flesh to stand by Luke as he confronts the Emperor.

It's all a bit complex and doesn't entirely work as written, but there's much here that would have merited inclusion. In contrast to the oft-maligned (if misunderstood) midi-chlorians of the prequels, which some fans felt de-mystified the Force, these scenes were wholly mystical affairs, fascinating, and in keeping with how the saga had been building toward something grand.

In the rough draft, after Yoda dies, Obi-Wan confidently reassures Luke that the afterlife is a relief and that Yoda's students are awaiting him. There's no hint of him pressuring Luke to "confront" Vader *or else*. He merely warns him that his immediate future is going to be more difficult. It's a better choice for the character and for the story. Unfortunately, Kasdan found the metaphysical discussions boring, and Lucas was overly concerned that Guinness didn't want to talk about the Force. What the audience saw instead is a guilt-ridden Obi-Wan, awkwardly staged on a log, trying – as had Yoda – to convince Luke that if he doesn't commit patricide, "the Emperor has already won."

While these scenes can be said to work in retrospect (Lucas made good use of the Jedi's morally shaky grounds in the prequels), as they force Luke to seek out a better way on his own, Luke's own character arc is not as precipitous as it might have been. He's the strongest protagonist in *Jedi*, yet in early drafts and discussions, there was more complexity. Kasdan wanted to take the character further into the dark side, suggesting that Luke feign joining the Emperor, who would test his loyalty by having him turn the Death Star on the Rebel fleet.[116] Luke would instead target Had Abaddon. Hamill liked this idea of the audience not knowing if Luke would turn to the dark side, but it would have brought the film tonally back to *Empire*, which Lucas wanted to get away from.

In early drafts, the revelation of Leia as "the other" is inchoate, and on film it remains the saga's weakest moment. Hamill said the sibling revelation was pat, but Lucas rejoined that fairy tales *are* pat. This is true;

there is a certain rhythm and structure to fairy tales that are iconic, which is why they're still enjoyed centuries later. But the problem is not the revelation (which *Empire* actually foreshadows when Leia telepathically "hears" Luke's call for help). The issue is how it's executed. It should have been given emotional weight and depth. Instead, it's flat and Leia is forced to utter the throwaway line, "I know. Somehow, I've always known," which is hollow and implausible, given the passionate (and retroactively incestuous) kiss that the princess and Luke enjoyed in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

No film should be in so much of a hurry to get to the next action set-piece that it shortchanges authentic human drama. Carrie Fisher has blamed herself for not taking an extra beat to convey more emotion, but this was part of the script that had been kept hidden from the actors until the day of the shot, meaning there was no time for her to learn the lines. Given the weak material, she does an admirable job, but it's unfortunate that it slipped by the editors and screenwriters.

Lucas acknowledged that the Luke-Leia conversation was "one of those things you never want to have to write. It's a real challenge to come up with dialogue that is sincere and believable."[117] What's odd about that statement is that Lucas had a capable writer in Kasdan, who is known for his "sincere and believable" dialogue from his films *The Big Chill* and *Grand Canyon*, which leaves one to wonder if either Kasdan failed to step up to the plate or if there are yet additional cut scenes that haven't come to light.

You Don't Know the Power of the Dark Side

Lucas's determination to have a lighter, fun film also eroded his intent to explore, in any kind of serious way, the theme of a primitive people defeating a superior technological force. The Ewoks, which are generally the bane of those who dislike the film, aren't so much the problem as is the fact that they're too often comic relief, and they hijack the film from Han and Leia, who are forced to play second-fiddle to teddy bears. The ease with which they succeed appears to say that any task force could have knocked out the shield generator, rendering Han and Leia entirely superfluous to the story. That's a big mistake from a screenplay perspective.

It’s C-3PO who allows the Ewoks and Rebels to work together, though it’s through no effort of his own, but rather because the script tells us the Ewoks worship golden robots as gods. And the only reason they even meet the Ewoks is that Han steps on a twig, which causes Leia to rush off on her speeder bike, fall, and meet Wicket. As far as screenplay writing is concerned, this barely passes muster.

The metaphor of the Ewoks as Việt Cộng doesn’t work when placed in the context of a physical comedy. Around the time the film was released, Lucas argued that filmmakers have a moral responsibility to their audiences: “People in the film industry don’t want to accept the responsibility that they had a hand in the way the world is loused up. Films and television tell us the way we conduct our lives, what is right and wrong.”[118] This is a commendable stance to take, but in toning down his own film to make it appear less violent, he actually propagandized violence, portraying war as an exciting and bloodless adventure. The need for more Ewok corpses isn’t to satisfy the depraved bloodlust of violence-addicted audiences, but rather to make clear the cost, horror, and immorality of war.

And contrary to his call for greater “moral responsibility,” he has Luke Skywalker commit what is, for all intents and purposes, a war crime. After Jabba’s minions are disarmed, Luke then proceeds to blow up Jabba’s sail barge, killing *everyone* onboard, including servants, musicians, droids, and others who had no part in Jabba’s actions. That Luke assumes the role of judge and jury, committing them all to destruction for no other reason than their affiliation with Jabba, is particularly egregious when one considers that Han Solo once worked for the Hutt, and that the crime lord had numerous slaves and unfortunates bound to him due to debts.

The heroes had already proven victorious and could have escaped without difficulty, making Luke’s destruction of the barge – unlike the Death Star, which had destroyed Alderaan and was about to destroy Yavin IV – come off as vicious and punitive, particularly as there’s no comment made about it. If it had been used to demonstrate a step in the direction of his bending to the dark side, as Anakin’s slaughter of the Tusken Raiders had been, that would have been a significant story point. Rather, it appears Lucas merely wanted to end the scene with a bang. This creates a strange double-standard: Luke won’t kill his father, but he has no problem killing anyone else’s father, mother, son, or daughter. Considering that Lucas had

set out to create a morally responsible film for kids, and that on the sail barge were such “dangerous” types as Max Rebo, Droopy McCool, and Salacious Crumb, this act seems wholly out of place.[119]

Like father, like son: Luke Skywalker refuses to give in to the dark side in his fight against Vader, but has no qualms with taking the lives of seeming innocents earlier in the picture.

So Be It, Jedi!

In some ways, the elements that helped make *Star Wars* and *Empire* stand out from their genre predecessors (their scope, breadth, and depth) may have hurt *Jedi* in the public mind, as the film not only had its predecessors to be compared to, but also a host of new movies that had come out during and after those films, building on the template they started, and elevating the bar for fantasy and science-fiction cinema even higher. *Alien* took the lived-in aesthetic from *Star Wars* and ramped it up with a dimension of terror never so realistically portrayed. *Conan the Barbarian* transferred the sword-and-sorcery tales of *Weird Tales* alumnus Robert E. Howard to the big screen with power and gravitas. And the animated film *Heavy Metal* demonstrated to audiences how fantasy and science fiction could be articulated in ways that were dark, epic, and subversively humorous.

Add to these the groundbreaking *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn*, *The Thing*, *Blade Runner*, *Escape from New York*, *Excalibur,* and *The Dark Crystal*. Audiences raised on *Star Wars* had been soaking in this new wave of genre pictures, while others were discovering the genre anew in literature.

Lucas’s decision to move in a more kid-friendly direction for his third installment was bound to raise hackles, and not just from adults, but from his target audience, some of whom felt pandered to. Treating children as if they’re not developed enough to handle nuance, complexity, or ambiguity is a form of unintentional condescension that reveals a general lack of understanding of young people as one mass group who can only digest pabulum. Many children, like many adults, respond to compelling stories and engaging characters, and don’t require saccharine sweetness and neatly wrapped, upbeat endings. In the case of *Return of the Jedi*, this misunderstanding led to an unfortunate sacrifice of the story in order to be able to package it in a way that Lucas believed a prepubescent audience could comprehend.

There’s no doubt that *Return of the Jedi* could have been commercially successful while upholding Lucas’s desire for an uplifting, moral film without sacrificing its quality and the tonal realism established by the prior two movies. Lucas himself conceived of ways in which the story would have worked better.

Apart from his changing the look of the Ewoks, the second act would have been stronger had they been given actual characterizations beyond being merely cute and silly. Had Lucas gone with his original plan of including the Yuzzem, tall beings with long legs that the Ewoks sometimes rode, the Endor scenes would have had a more interesting visual palette. And if the Empire had destroyed the home of the Yuzzem in order to build their shield generator, that would have added an element of social commentary involving tribal rights and environmental degradation (which the early drafts contained). It also would have given the Ewok natives an actual motive for fighting the Empire.

Another idea would have been to have Han and Leia initially decline the Ewoks' help, only to find the Rebel forces’ attempts to defeat the Imperial legions result in tragedy, so that our heroes are left with no choice but to agree to the teddy bears' assistance. Such a scene would have raised the stakes considerably, and would have made for a more triumphal conclusion.

The shield generator itself, a focal point for the ground battle, would have benefited by being redesigned into a more formidable construction. Since they could not realize Had Abaddon onscreen, having the shield generator housed inside an ancient ruin, perhaps with its own guardian,

would have been interesting. Lucas employed a similar concept in the *Clone Wars* season-one episode “Lair of Grievous.” Had Boba Fett had not been disposed of for a pointless gag, he could have provided such a role, giving Han and Leia a significant challenge to overcome.[120] An even stronger extension of this idea would have been to tie the first and third acts together, by having Luke, Leia, and Han escape from Jabba’s palace prior to the sail barge sequence, leaving the Hutt and his minions to show up in the third act, hired by the Empire and seeking revenge for having been tricked and humiliated.

This still leaves the issue of Lucas’s desire for a bloodless battle, but one way around this would have been for the Ewoks to be established – as had the similarly furry Lurmen in the first season of *The Clone Wars* TV series – as pacifists, showing how such a culture would overcome the Empire without resorting to violence, utilizing traps and tricks that would buy the Rebels time to destroy the shield generator. This would have also made for a more morally responsible story, as Lucas claimed was important, and would have created a parallel with Luke’s own decision not to engage in violence against his father, heightening Lucas’s desire for audiences “to be uplifted emotionally and spiritually, and feel absolutely good about life.”[121]

Help Me Take This Mask Off

The *Special Editions* provided Lucas with the rare opportunity to go back and correct elements with which he was never satisfied. For *Return of the Jedi*, the *Special Edition* (beginning with the 1997 theatrical rerelease and concluding with the 2011 Blu-ray release), while making some improvements, added other controversial elements, and didn’t go far enough in restoring the film to the best it could be.

“Jedi Rocks,” the incongruously named song-and-dance number in Jabba’s palace, is one of the more unpopular changes. “Lapti Nek” was no masterpiece, but it was catchy, and it reflected Jabba’s bad taste in a way that was both amusing and unobtrusive. This was replaced by a Vegas-styled big production, coupled with newly rendered CGI Muppets of Sy Snootles and new band member Joh Yowza panning to the camera like Looney Tunes characters. Prior to this change, one could imagine the untold

danger and violence roaming the gloomy corridors and smoky passageways (a concept brought to great fruition in the Bantam-Spectra anthology *Tales from Jabba's Palace*). Once the ugly and overly long "Jedi Rocks" played, however, the shadows and secrets gave way to brightly lit toy aisles.

A digital rendering of Sy Snootles and the introduction of Joh Yowza are among the many baffling changes in the *Return of the Jedi Special Edition*.

The other controversial changes involve Darth Vader. The first comes with an added "No!" to his dialogue as Palpatine is torturing Luke, which is followed by a longer (and clichéd) "Nooooo!" when he throws the Emperor down the reactor shaft. The original version of this scene has a palpable feeling of both dread and anticipation, as the viewer breathlessly watches the internal debate raging in Vader's mind as he looks from master to son. There is no dialogue, only the sound of lightning and dark music underscoring the crucial moment. And then, after the viewer can hold on no longer, Vader makes his decision, picking up the Emperor and hurling him over the edge of a chasm. The utterance of "No!" spoils the build-up because the audience is now told in advance what Vader is thinking. Vader stands stoic in the original, but the viewer can sense the agony in his mind. When this is telegraphed in the *Special Edition*, the suspense is taken away, and it loses its elegance and intensity.[122]

The second change comes with the replacement of Sebastian Shaw as "ghost" Anakin with Hayden Christiansen of *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. This is a lesser problem for the story, but a larger issue for those who dislike the prequels. In truth, the original version has problems due to the fact that Vader turns out to be a disappointingly average old man. This is, of course, the point: the evil actions of the world are not

carried out by hideous-looking monsters, but by average humans who fall to greed and the abuse of power.

Yet, if his reveal onboard the Death Star is fitting, his ghost version seems rather ungainly. The *Special Edition* merely replaces one awkward scene with another that is even *more* awkward. Now, there's a 20-something young man standing there next to aged versions of Obi-Wan and Yoda, which has unpleasant implications about the afterlife. Then there is the matter of Luke, who must be wondering who the grinning blonde specter is. A better solution would be to show the three of them looking as they did in their old age, then flash to them *all* looking youthful. To this scene, I would also add Qui-Gon Jinn, who is instrumental to Anakin's, Obi-Wan's, and Yoda's histories.[123]

In addition to these, there are minor changes that vary from good (fixing the obvious problems with the rancor effects) to mediocre (replacing the bad visual effects of Han's defrosting to equally bad visual effects) to unfortunate. After Lando says to Han, at the Great Pit of Carkoon, "I thought you were blind," Han originally responded, "It's alright, you can trust me." In the *Special Edition*, this is changed to, "It's alright, I can see a lot better." The latter provides clarification to the audience that Han's eyesight is improving, but it's spoon-feeding, as Han's accurate shot on the sarlacc's tentacle tells us that. More important, the original line recalled Lando's dialogue in *Empire*, telling Han to trust him (said just prior to Lando betraying him). That Han says it back at that moment, when Lando is in jeopardy, is a bit of playful mockery.

The *Special Edition* of *Jedi* does boast one major improvement, and that is the elimination of the hideously inappropriate closing song "Yub Nub," which had been the nail in the coffin for all but the youngest of fans, ending the film like an episode of *The Care Bears*, and so tonally out of place that it competes with the *Star Wars Holiday Special* for the most cringe-worthy moment. John Williams replaces it with an ethereal, melancholy, flute-driven piece that completely alters the feel of the conclusion by putting it in a much more bittersweet and haunting context. This is set off by a breathtaking pan across the galaxy that shows viewers other planets celebrating as they hear the news of the Emperor's final defeat, connecting audiences back to the framework of the entire saga and playing as a reminder of the larger war that's played out, as well as of the characters

who are saying goodbye to the audience. One might see Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Billy Dee Williams, Peter Mayhew, Anthony Daniels, and Kenny Baker over the years, but never again like this.

Father, I Won’t Leave You

On the other hand, the *Special Edition* missed opportunities to fix effects, such as the skiff and matte painting of the *Millennium Falcon*, and to add new moments. Dare I say it, the battle on Endor actually needs *more* Ewoks, and it would have been interesting to see various other tribes arrive in time for the final battle. But the most significant omission was the failure to restore important deleted scenes.

The New Lightsaber

In his meditation chamber, Vader calls out to Luke, who is just finishing the construction of his new lightsaber. The scene establishes that Vader is still interested in having his son join him, and that he must come to the dark side. With Luke cowled and in shadow, it’s an evocative visual that hearkens perfectly to *Empire*, and gives the film a much-needed sense of gravity and connectivity. When Luke goes to meet his father, Vader mentions the new 'saber, which is a nice callback to this scene.

The Sandstorm

Visually and thematically interesting, this is one of the few emotionally resonant scenes in the film that shows the camaraderie between Luke, Han, and Leia. The dialogue is quite good, and it’s a touching scene, as Han stops to say a heartfelt thank-you to Luke for saving him. The final film replaces this with a static shot of Hamill sitting in his X-wing listening to Ford recite lines, a terrible reduction of both the performances and emotion.

Grand Moff Jerjerrod

There are two significant scenes with Jerjerrod that warrant re-inclusion. The first deals with his attempt to prevent Vader from seeing the Emperor, a move that results in Vader choking him and the Imperial Guards raising their staffs in unison to attack the Sith Lord. It’s fascinating to see them actually do something other than stand around ornamentally, and their courage speaks to the reason Palpatine keeps them so close. Vader’s actions

also tie in to *Empire*, recalling his violent tendencies toward arrogant underlings. That he actually backs off from killing Jerjerrod shows growth on his part. It's short, tense, and well-shot, and deserves to be restored.

The second Jerjerrod scene is even more significant because it ties into the climax and clarifies the Emperor's thinking. One of the larger failings of the final film is that there's no reason for the Emperor or Vader to think Luke would turn to the dark side, let alone join them, as neither has anything with which to tempt him. Lucas came to recognize this, going to great lengths in the prequels to depict Palpatine's temptation of Anakin (arguably one of the strongest aspects of that trilogy). With *Jedi*, the idea is put forth that Luke's hatred for the Emperor and for his "weak father" would push him over the edge, and this is indeed how the actions play out. But even if Luke did turn and kill Vader or the Emperor, why would he then join the other?

The deleted Jerjerrod scene clarifies this. The Emperor instructs the Grand Moff to target Endor if the shield generator is destroyed. His threat, "There is no escape. The Alliance will die," now has palpable meaning for Luke. The Alliance and his friends are in a no-win situation unless he turns to the dark side, kills his father, and joins the Emperor. *There* is the Emperor's carrot and stick! Join him and they live; refuse and watch his sister and friends die.

Yoda's Confession

"Obi-Wan would have told you long ago had I let him…" This line is uttered by Yoda in a deleted scene just prior to the time he joins the Force, and it provides added complexity to the story. With this new information, we see that it wasn't Obi-Wan's decision to mislead and misdirect Luke, but part of a larger plan to pit son against father (in keeping with the flawed portrayal of the Jedi in the prequels). It also takes some of the blame off of Obi-Wan, as Luke comes to see that this hard decision was one that the aged Jedi Master made.

Additional deleted scenes not yet released would include a lengthier version of Luke revealing to Leia her heritage; additional battle scenes including General Madine, the Mon Calamari, and some female pilots; and, purportedly but not confirmed, the Emperor mockingly querying about

Yoda (which appears in the novelization): “There was one called....Yoda… Lives he still?”

An extended edition of this film would provide a fascinating and superior alternate cut. *Return of the Jedi* would benefit even more from an entire re-cut from the dailies. “*Jedi* is paced a little faster,” Lucas explained. “It’s as fast as you can make it and still be able to tell a comprehensible story. *Jedi* is almost incomprehensible in certain areas. It’s designed more for kids… I have constantly been experimenting with trying to get the story told as quickly as possible while adding in as many entertainment values as one can possibly have, to express an idea as swiftly as possible. It’s a form of minimalism.”[124]

There is a time and place for speed, but to edit the entire film that way is to turn it into a cartoon that panders to what adults think kids want. A new cut could create a movie that is better-paced, deeper, more character-based, and emotionally satisfying.

Fantasy, science fiction, and big-budget action-adventures are now run-of-the-mill Hollywood affairs, and much of what is good and bad in them can be traced back to the *Star Wars* saga. For all its faults, the franchise stands apart, frustratingly imperfect at times, a reflection of its imperfect creator and the less-than-ideal circumstances that surrounded the films, but also magnificent, unique, special, and magical. The original trilogy led not only to other genre films, but also to a tremendous literary legacy of hundreds of books, comic books, short stories, animated series, and more, all of which told a single interconnected and interdependent story set in that universe.

Star Wars inspired a generation to dream, and *Return of the Jedi* is part of that legacy – even if, for some, it serves as a moral lesson on the imprudence of sacrificing art for commerce. If one must blame Lucas for having bowed to that, then perhaps it’s appropriate to defer the final word to him, as he turns the mirror back on his critics:

“Popcorn pictures have always ruled. Why do people go see them? Why is the public so stupid? That’s not my fault.”[125]

The Ecology of Tatooine as the Epicenter of the *Star Wars* Films

by Matthew Sunrich

> If there's a bright center to the galaxy, you're on the planet that it's farthest from.
>
> — Luke Skywalker, *Star Wars: A New Hope*

Tatooine is — to use a phrase that has come into popular usage in the last few years — a hot mess.

It's a wonder that anyone would live there. It's a wonder that anyone *could*. It appears, at first blush, uninhabitable. Fresh out of the escape pod, C-3PO describes it as "desolate," and there could hardly be a better word to describe the place. Viewers can practically *feel* the dry heat radiating from the screen, and there is an almost palpable sense of desperation emanating from the sand and rocky terrain.

Yet the inescapable fact is that if it were not for Tatooine, *Star Wars* would not even exist. The planet gave rise to both Anakin and Luke Skywalker, unquestionably the primary players in the franchise, and is, in its way, a metaphor for the entire film series.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Before we go any further, it's important to point out that the observations offered in this essay are written exclusively through the lens of the films (no pun intended). In other words, none of the explanations or rationalizations provided by the Expanded Universe will be considered here. This is not to disparage the work of the myriad, talented people involved in its creation, but rather to offer a fresh perspective on Tatooine and the hugely significant events that take place there. The Expanded Universe is immensely vast, spanning thousands of worlds. From that

standpoint, Tatooine might seem to be the minor, insignificant dustball Luke makes it out to be. But what if there had never been an E.U.? How might we view the films — and, specifically, Tattoine's role in them — if we had nothing else to draw our conclusions from, and could base our theories and perceptions only on the on-screen evidence?

Let's begin by examining the nature of the *Star Wars* universe and exploring how Tatooine fits into its grand scheme. The focus will primarily be on *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi*, although elements from the prequels will come into play as well.

The films seem to suggest that planets and their moons are more or less analogous to what ecologists call biomes. You may remember the term from middle-school science class; also referred to as ecosystems, biomes are essentially climactic "genres," i.e., areas with distinctive precipitation (or lack thereof), plant growth, and animal life. When someone says "desert," for example, people automatically know what that means, although there are some terms, such as "xeric shrubland," that are more obscure.

The desert is certainly a biome, and even though we *know* that the movies were filmed on Earth, we don't find it a stretch at all to consider that there could be an entire planet somewhere that is just a huge, arid wasteland (after all, scientists discovered a planet in 2012 made entirely of *diamond*, [126] and that's a far more remote possibility). This is also demonstrated by Hoth (tundra), Dagobah (wetland), and Endor's moon (deciduous forest). I'm not going to turn this into a science lesson, but suffice it to say that *Star Wars* takes the idea of the biome and expands it to encompass entire worlds.

This is actually a more interesting idea than it might seem on the surface, because while it's true that there are planets in our own solar system that represent climates on both ends of the spectrum (extreme heat and extreme cold), they are not known to be capable of sustaining life, at least not in any form with which we are familiar. Tatooine clearly *can* sustain life, but it requires quite a bit of effort on the part of those who choose to reside there.

The twin suns of Tatooine's sky (Tatoo I and Tatoo II) provide a beautiful view on the horizon, one enjoyed by many of the planet's residents.

One of the most striking aspects of Tatooine is that it revolves around two suns. In cosmology, this is referred to as a binary star system. The twin suns in this sort of system orbit around a shared center of mass. Though it is unclear exactly how two suns would affect the climate on an orbitting planet, it's unlikely that it would be much different from one. We *can* conclude that Tatooine is far enough away from its suns that the heat does not prevent creatures from living on it. We are told nothing about the planet's atmosphere, but it's safe to assume that it has something akin to our ozone layer, which prevents creatures on its surface from catching on fire. I'm sure that George Lucas's impetus for giving it two suns was simply to make it seem more alien, but if we're going to approach it from a hermetic angle, we have to assume that it's not just a whimsical aesthetic choice. In any event, it *does* make sense that a desert planet, typified by its hot climate, might have more than one sun.

The inhabitants of Tatooine are barely more than scavengers. There is nothing "new" on the planet, so they have to make do with what's already there, and most of it is, in many cases, someone else's trash (how the stuff got there in the first place is a bit of a mystery in itself). The extreme environment seems to have a deleterious effect on machinery (C-3PO's joints are in serious danger of locking up after just a few hours, for instance), so nothing is bound to stay in prime condition for long.

All the creatures can do is scrounge and hope that whatever they find can be fixed or repurposed. This is, undoubtedly, exactly how Anakin was

able to build C-3PO (and also explains why the droid initially has no casing). Watto, after all, runs a junk shop and frequently tasks his young slave with repair jobs or leaves him to look after things while the Toydarian is away, giving Anakin ample opportunities to pocket a few wires or a handful of screws.

Unlike Egypt, perhaps the most famous of Earth's desert civilizations, there is no river (that we know of) that floods annually to provide arable soil to its denizens. There are likely no rivers or bodies of water at all, in fact. Adaptability is the defining characteristic of the creatures there, and it manifests itself in various ways that reflect much about the character of the individual or group.

The Jawas exemplify this notion quite well. It's hard to imagine where they managed to find such an enormous transport, but they certainly make the best use of it. They are the junkmen of the realm. Their stock-in-trade is droids, and they are, at the very least, competent if not expert at acquiring and repairing them (the R2 unit with the "bad motivator"[127] notwithstanding). It isn't clear if they're actually criminals, per se, but it's obvious that they are insistent and irritating and will exploit any opportunity, no matter how questionable, to obtain items that will keep their livelihood going.

Before we are introduced to Luke and his uncle, Owen Lars, we might reasonably assume that there are no humans living on the planet, though this, of course, turns out not to be the case. (It is interesting to note that R2-D2 believes settlements exist as soon as they land on the planet, though this is probably due to the information that Leia gave him concerning his mission. Judging by his tone, C-3PO, by contrast, is likely not convinced that the planet is inhabited at all. He seems to perceive Tatooine as just a world on which they happened to land – the closest in proximity to their besieged vessel.) In addition to Obi-Wan, whose presence there is justified, there are others, such as the barkeep[128] at the Mos Eisley cantina, and Luke mentions two friends, Biggs and Tank[129] – although, as his Aunt Beru observes, many of his pals have already left.

Owen makes his living by farming moisture, of all things. Can you imagine living on a planet where moisture itself is a commodity? His job is clearly important to him, though, and it's unlikely that he would be interested in doing anything else. It is fair to assume that he is successful if

he can afford to purchase droids (even pre-owned ones) from the Jawas, and to own so much specialized equipment. He has found his place in the world, he has an important role in the community, and while we may not agree with or understand it, we can't help but admire him, even though he's hiding the truth about a great many things from Luke.

There is also, of course, the appeal of its being a "safe" vocation. When Luke suggests that the droids might have been stolen and might be the property of Ben Kenobi, Owen tries, rather angrily, to hush the whole thing up. The anxious look that he and Beru exchange reveals that there is more to this than meets the eye. Owen's refusal to give Luke any further information can be attributed not only to his sworn responsibility to protect his nephew, but also to his desire to preserve their way of life. He cannot allow anything to jeopardize that which he has spent so much time and energy building. Owen would like to make a farmer out of Luke, particularly since he and Beru have no children of their own (and apparently no farm-hands that aren't droids), but Beru recognizes that this is not going to happen, much to her husband's chagrin.

Luke makes no secret of the fact that he holds the planet in contempt. He calls it a "rock" and compares staying there to "going nowhere." It is unstated whether or not the "academy" Luke wishes to attend is located on Tatooine, but logic would seem to dictate that it is not. While it appears that his aunt and uncle have been kind to him, his greatest wish is to leave Tatooine with all speed. Many teenagers fantasize about striking out on their own, and Luke is no different. Like his father, he possesses an almost preternatural talent for piloting spacecraft, and although he is initially unaware of the source of this talent, he knows that he'll never be able to use his skills to their utmost potential in a remote desert setting.

We next encounter the Sand People (Tusken Raiders) and are told virtually nothing about them except that they are not to be trifled with, and that they always travel single-file to hide their numbers.[130] They are a strange species, and it's impossible to tell anything about their physiology. It seems that they are wearing masks, but it's just as likely that they are a species that has, through countless generations, adapted to the planet's harsh environment. Their oral communication, from what we can discern, consists of little more than savage ululations. Whereas the Jawas are certainly more bothersome than dangerous, the Sand People are fierce

predators and probably nomadic. The fact that they are so mysterious and unsettling in appearance is precisely what makes them so compelling.

The vermiform Hutts, alluded to in *A New Hope* but not seen until *Jedi* and not more than one at a time until *The Phantom Menace* (I am choosing here to ignore Lucas's egregious reinsertion of Jabba into Docking Bay 94 in subsequent releases of *A New Hope*), clearly have a controlling interest in the place, but it's remarkable that anyone would even want that. There must be *some* value in the planet (otherwise, they would have abandoned it), but it's not readily apparent. Perhaps they just see it as an easy place to practice their illicit or quasi-illicit dealings and live like kings, since Tatooine doesn't appear to have much in the way of government.

Besides, where else could such revolting creatures hope to thrive?

C-3PO and R2-D2 stand outside Jabba the Hutt's palace, seen here in a concept sketch by Ralph McQuarrie.

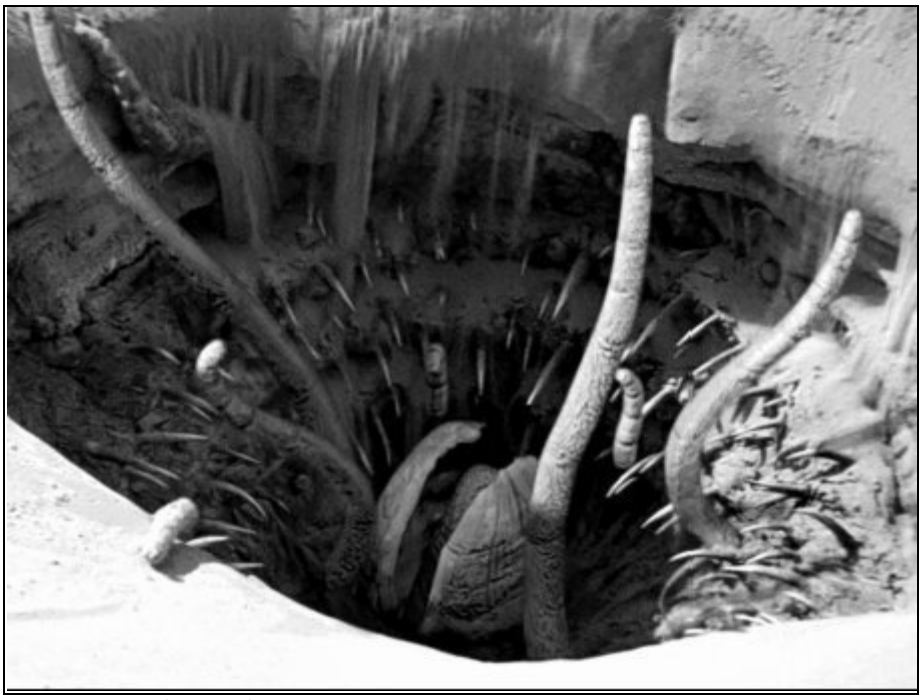
Considering that there isn't much to do for entertainment in the desert, it comes as little surprise that the residents would resort to vice. The most widespread example of this is rampant gambling. In *Phantom*, we learn that podraces are a major pastime and a popular destination for gamblers. Competitors of various races participate, and the stakes are about as high as it gets. Jabba oversees the race that eats up way too much of the film's runtime, and he is undoubtedbly betting on it (even if he does sleep through the races).

Jabba's palace is not so magnificent as merely *large*, but it seems a fitting dwelling for an obnoxious, bloated sack of who-knows-what. Throwing the unwary to the rancor that he keeps in the pit beneath his

throne alleviates the boredom from time to time, and it's anyone's guess where such a thing came from (the sorrow displayed by its keeper[131] after Luke slays it is more than a little unsettling). Jabba surrounds himself with sycophants from parts unknown, and it is very likely that most, if not all, would gladly kill him if the chance were to arise. Loyalty is, after all, not always what it seems.

One can't help but wonder how Tatooine was settled in the first place. It's possible that it wasn't always a desert. It's amazing how rapidly an environment can change, given the proper circumstances. Was it once a planet of lush forests and rolling savannahs that was farmed to death? This is, remember, exactly what happened in the Midwestern United States around the time of the Great Depression. A number of factors, including over-farming and decreased rainfall, turned the center of the country into a wasteland. And the enormous clouds of dust that were stirred up could be seen as far away as the District of Columbia. Thankfully, the nation got things under control, but an unchecked disaster of this nature could conceivably overtake an entire planet.

Who (or what) are the indigenous species? The sarlacc comes immediately to mind, as it appears to be a part of the planet itself. It has been argued that *Return of the Jedi* failed to measure up to the quality of the first two films in the original trilogy, but it did introduce us to this utterly terrifying and fascinating entity[132]. The very idea that you could just be cruising across the sand dunes (people do that, right?) and, thanks to one ill-placed step, suddenly find yourself tumbling into the toothy, slobbering maw of some effectively immortal, sentient pit is the stuff of nightmares. The fact that it takes an incredibly long time for its prey to be digested figures in quite well, as its meals are sure to be few and far between, unless Jabba frequently uses it as a method of execution, which could very well be true. After all, it's the first thing that comes to his mind when the Rebels are captured.



The sarlacc is one of the (if not *the*) most recognizable species indigineous to the planet Tatooine.

Despite all of this insanity (or perhaps *because* of it), Tatooine attracts a veritable menagerie of extraterrestrial beings, most of them disreputable. Shady types from all over the galaxy frequent Mos Eisley, which not only is a spaceport but also appears to be one of the planet's major settlements. The most well-known gathering for cosmic inconnus is the cantina, famous for being a "wretched hive of scum and villainy." It is also noteworthy for not bothering to "card" minors desiring libations, for not allowing droids, and for featuring an ambiance enhanced by monotonous elevator music performed by a band made up of weirdos with oversized, bald heads and mouth flaps like the jambs on a Romanesque cathedral.

Upon entering the cantina, we are confronted with a plethora of bizarre creatures. Most of the bar's patrons are humanoid, but the similarity between them and humans is only recognizable from the neck down. Some of their heads are barely identifiable as such, resembling either terrestrial fauna or monstrosities from the ocean's deepest trenches. Their modes of speech are just as jarring, and we marvel at how such sounds can even be interpreted as words. This tableau provides us with a perfect illustration of just how "alien" the *Star Wars* universe is, as well as how *vast*.

Before stepping inside, Obi-Wan warns Luke that the place can be a "little rough." Luke tries to act as nonchalant as he can, but it isn't long before someone confronts him. The creature, popularly known as "Walrus Man," and his pig-nosed compatriot[133] are clearly just looking for a fight, an opportunity to make an example out of someone they perceive as being an easy target. Obi-Wan's intervention defuses the situation, and the blasé reaction of the other patrons to a severed arm tells us either that this sort of thing happens all the time, or that they all know better than to get involved. Moreover, the scene, taken as a whole, demonstrates that malefaction is a universal trait, not one merely limited to the species with which we are accustomed, as if we had any cause to doubt this.

Having found a pilot to take them to Alderaan, namely Han Solo, Luke and Obi-Wan waste no time in getting off the planet. Luke claims that he will never return, but just a few years later, he finds himself once again traipsing across Tatooine's arid landscape to rescue the very man who helped him escape in the first place. This return trip not only provides us with the opportunity to see more of what the planet has to offer (admittedly, not much) but also reinvigorates our faith in the Rebellion via Jabba's dramatic defeat.

It is significant that when Luke appears at Jabba's palace, he has become a Jedi Knight, despite having truncated his training with Yoda. While his fateful encounter with Darth Vader at Cloud City and the startling truth revealed there certainly contributed to this, his apotheosis, in a manner of speaking, is more closely related to the fact that his return to Tatooine had less to do with rescuing Solo and more to do with the grand design.

The question is, why do we keep returning to Tatooine, time and again? What is so special about it?

To answer that, let's examine the Force — and, again, from the standpoint of the films themselves. Whatever you've learned about the nature of the Force from the Expanded Universe and *The Clone Wars*, try to set it aside for a moment and consider only what the movies tell us about it.

Obi-Wan describes the Force as "an energy field created by all living things" that keeps the galaxy in one piece and gives a Jedi his power. Luke accepts this at face value and soon begins his rudimentary training under the old man's tutelage, but he quickly encounters a skeptic in the form of Han Solo. The Jedi are all but extinct by this point, yet Solo has heard about

the Force and has, based on his personal experiences, dismissed its existence. Despite the fact that Luke has only known of it for a short time, he leaps to its defense, which seems to indicate an innate connection that he cannot explain.

Solo represents an audience proxy on the issue, as the simultaneously vague and peculiar nature of the Force might be a bit hard for people to swallow (especially when you consider that it's based on Eastern mysticism, which is mostly unknown in the West). Not much more is said about it. Solo does say "May the Force be with you" to Luke before he embarks on his mission to destroy the Death Star, though it is unclear whether the smuggler has changed his mind or is just offering a platitude to soften the blow of his premature egress.

Tatooine is home to the Mos Eisley cantina, a wretched hive of scum and villainy where, for the right price, a pilot can be found to transport an old man and a young boy with no questions asked.

In any case, Lucas probably felt that the Force needed to be made more plausible, so in the first prequel he introduced the fan-vexing notion of midi-chlorians, microscopic entities that live in the cells of all creatures, in varying concentrations, and channel the Force. The unusually high count in Anakin's bloodstream is a clear indication of his significance, and when his mother, Shmi Skywalker, tells Jedi Knight Qui-Gon Jinn that Anakin was a virgin birth, this seems to suggest that the Force itself impregnated her. Setting plausibility aside for a moment, let's consider another issue. If it is, in fact, true that the Force itself is Anakin's father, why did it choose Tatooine as his birthplace?

Perhaps it is *not* true, as Luke remarks, that Tatooine is an insignificant planet. Let's not forget how often the most important things frequently have humble beginnings. Tatooine is unquestionably a remote world. What Luke doesn't realize is that it is that selfsame remoteness that makes it an ideal hiding place. He is, of course, unaware of who his father is and, by extension, who *he* is at the beginning of *A New Hope*. This information has been withheld from him for his own good. Obi-Wan did not choose Tatooine by accident. It was a calculated decision. It is crucial that Luke be kept off Vader's radar.[134] The fact that Luke has family there creates what he sees as an ideal situation, even though it might not seem so to all of those involved (or to the audience).

Bearing all of this in mind, I propose that Tatooine could be the locus of the Force's *greatest concentration*. This might appear to be an outrageous claim (especially to those well-versed in EU lore), but bear with me here. It seems reasonable that there would be a "center" for the Force, a metaphorical hub of operations, a nucleus where it collects, not unlike a black hole swallowing matter and light. Far from destructive and inescapable, this center amplifies the Force's potential to astonishing levels, unattainable anywhere else. If we think of the Force as energy, then it has the potential for both beneficence and malice. We know this, since both the Jedi and the Sith draw upon it. The Force itself is neutral, which would explain why it brought Luke — the one capable of bringing balance to itself — into being, albeit indirectly via Shmi and Anakin.

It is possible that Anakin was intended to be the "chosen one," as Qui-Gon believes, but unanticipated circumstances changed things. The amount of sentience that the Force possesses is, after all, unclear. Had Shmi not been murdered by the Sand People, it is conceivable that Anakin might not have turned to the dark side. While it's true that Yoda sensed a great deal of fear in him, which was ultimately Anakin's gateway to iniquity, that fear could have been alleviated had he been allowed to return to Tatooine to free the slaves, as was his objective when he joined the Jedi Order. He clearly had the heart of a Jedi; he just allowed unfortunate circumstances to turn him from the right path.

Luke's return to his home planet represents the consummation of his relationship with the Force – a bookend, if you will. He is first told about

the Force by Obi-Wan, and *that* is the clear demarcation between Luke the farm boy and Luke the Jedi-to-be. There is no going back once he has wrapped his fingers around the pommel of a lightsaber and has heard its distinctive hum. This is the beginning of his journey, and when he comes back, the Force bathes him in its essence, “knowing” that he has proven himself through numerous battles against the Empire. The process is complete.

Luke's ascension to a full-fledged Jedi is a surprise to both the viewers and to at least one of his allies. Remember that when the unfrozen Han is thrown into the cell in Jabba’s palace with Chewbacca, he is amazed by the revelation that Luke has become a Jedi Knight and accuses him of having “delusions of grandeur.” Following Jabba’s crushing defeat, which provides us with a superb display of Luke’s abilities, Luke immediately heads back to the Dagobah System to continue his training with Yoda, but, in the last few breaths he has remaining as he prepares to pass on, the ancient Jedi Master tells him that there is nothing left to teach him (in direct opposition to his plea in *Empire* that Luke not leave before his training is complete). Looking back to the events of that earlier film, we can’t help but recall that many of Luke’s exercises were met with failure because he lacked the necessary faith to succeed and, thus, we wonder what brought on such a dramatic change in him. The explanation is, simply, that the Force picked up where Yoda left off.

It is interesting to consider that both Watto and Jabba demonstrate strong resistance, perhaps even immunity, to the Force’s influence. This could be attributed to the unique physiologies of their respective species, but that seems like an incomplete explanation. If, as Obi-Wan explains, the Force is generated by all living things, how could anything resist it? It seems that Tatooine’s unique role as the epicenter of the Force not only intensifies itself in Jedi, but also provides increased resistance to those who already demonstrate an innate predisposition against it. Remember that the Force desires balance, and that can only be achieved through playing fair by both sides. It is, however, worth mentioning that this resistance, at least in the case of Watto and Jabba, only causes minor setbacks and does not prevent the Jedi from achieving their goals.

Luke describes Tatooine as being the planet farthest from the bright center of the universe, and his father Anakin also held his birth world in low

regard (particularly its sand). And yet, Tatooine appears in five of the six live-action films to date, as well as the *Clone Wars* theatrical film and even the *Star Wars Holiday Special*. If the trailer for *The Force Awakens* is any indication, it will feature prominently in that movie as well — and given the premise of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, it's likely the planet will show up there, too.

The Empire Strikes Back is the sole exception,[135] and it is in that film, away from Tatooine, that Luke suffers a crushing defeat by losing a hand and his father's lightsaber, failing to save Han Solo, and nearly dying in the process. Viewed through a films-only lens, willfully ignoring for a moment all of the knowledge that the Expanded Universe and the various animated TV series contain, Tatooine becomes far more important than either Luke or Anakin ever realize. It becomes a metaphor for their entire story.

Lucas wisely chose to introduce us to the *Star Wars* universe by giving audiences something palatable. The narrative begins in space but, within minutes, resolves itself into a more familiar setting – i.e., a terrestrial planet. Space, to quote the late, great Douglas Adams, “is big, really big. You just won’t believe how vastly, hugely, mind-bogglingly big it is.”[136] It’s too much to process; it has the potential to lose and/or bore people. This, in fact, is the inherent problem with many cosmic science-fiction films. In order to understand the nature of the struggles Luke and the Rebellion are facing, we need to be able to see things in a manageable way.

The perplexing, frightening infinity of space fades into the background as we recall that *Star Wars* is, above all else, a story about people, not about star cruisers, lasers, and lightsabers (although those things are certainly awesome). The harsh terrain of Tatooine is the galaxy in miniature. The incalculable grains that make up its sandy expanse are akin to the galaxy’s stellar profusion, and the denizens of hundreds of planets frequent its surface. There is danger, but there is also friendship to be found if you know where to look for it.

Tatooine, not unlike space, is fraught with peril and essentially lawless, and one must use the available resources to the best effect to make one’s own way. It may not be bright, but it *is* the center of the universe.

Ee Chee Wa Maa! Lucas's Littlest Heroes Win Young Hearts and Minds on the Smallest of Screens

by Kevin Dilmore

Created by George Lucas as a primeval band of fuzzy warriors to serve as a counterpoint to the cold, technological soldiers of the Galactic Empire in 1983's *Return of the Jedi*, Ewoks have proven, over the course of more than 30 years, to be among the most divisive characters in the *Star Wars* universe. While some fans regard them as irritating, contemptible little furballs, others embrace the cuddly teddy bear-like beings with great affection. Generally, the line between Ewok love and hate can be drawn along the age that a fan was when he or she first discovered *Star Wars* or watched *Jedi* for the first time: the younger the fan, the more that person probably likes Ewoks.

It was that connection between young hearts and Ewoks that encouraged Lucas to expand the little creatures' world into a pair of made-for-television films that first aired in the United States in the 1980s. Rather than cater to more sophisticated viewers or more devoted *Star Wars* fans, the creators of these films aimed squarely at young audiences, and enjoyed a range of successes in doing so – at least in the short term. These days, the films are viewed more as a curiosity by some fans, as an annoyance by others, and as an enigma by nearly anyone who attempts to fit this pair of puzzling pieces into the greater picture of the *Star Wars* universe.

On 25 November 1984 – two days after the U.S. celebration of Thanksgiving and 18 months to the day after *Jedi*'s theatrical release –

ABC network affiliates across the United States broadcast *The Ewok Adventure*, a made-for-television film that had been shot over the course of eight weeks that summer for a reported $3 million. When released theatrically for international audiences, the telefilm received a new title, *Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure*, which was retained for subsequent releases on home video. Created for young audiences, the film centers on a pair of human children separated from their parents and the small band of cuddly-but-brave Ewoks who take on the task of reuniting them.

The Towani family with their Ewok compatriots (left to right): Widdle Warrick (Tony Cox), Mace (Eric Walker), Jeremitt (Guy Boyd), Catarine (Fionnula Flannagan), Cindel (Aubree Miller), and Wicket W. Warrick (Warwick Davis).

The story opens (thanks to information from an unseen narrator) one night on the Forest Moon of Endor. Worried parents Jeremitt and Catarine Towani search the wreckage of their visibly damaged starcruiser for their children, Mace and Cindel. The couple's vain shouts and surveys are interrupted by the late-night hunt of a giant axe-wielding, hair-covered humanoid who chases the couple into the surrounding thick woods.

The next morning, another worried parent – this time an Ewok named Deej – is starting a search of his own for his two missing sons, Weechee and Widdle. Ready to assist in the search is his youngest son, Wicket W. Warrick[137] (the first Ewok seen in *Return of the Jedi*), until Deej waves

him off and takes to the sky in a skin-winged wooden glider. In his ultimately successful search, the adult Ewok also spots a gleam of sunlight on the forest floor. The three investigate and discover the Towanis' wrecked ship, as well as its youngest passengers. While Cindel seems initially to trust the furry, friendly creatures, her older brother, Mace, picks a fight and threatens them with a weak-charged blaster. The Ewoks subdue the pre-teen boy, bind him to a pair of tree branches, and take the children to their primitive village.

At this point, a viewer familiar with the *Star Wars* saga, or at least *Return of the Jedi*, might be looking for visual or narrative ties to what he or she has seen on the big screen. Those ties are sorely lacking. The village appears to be ground-based huts rather than the network of treehouses depicted in *Return of the Jedi*. Looking around, there is no evidence of any epic battle or galactic heroism – there's not a single stormtrooper helmet-turned-drumhead to be seen – save for Mace's costume evoking the flight suit of an X-wing fighter pilot. It was only well after the Ewok movies aired that the events depicted in them were established as occurring between those in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* within official (at the time) *Star Wars* continuity.

Back on Endor, after Cindel suffers a bout with illness that the Ewoks seem to cure with a naturally derived elixir, she begins to communicate and bond with Wicket, the two seemingly peers in behavior and development, if not in age. Mace remains skeptical of and emotionally distant from his fuzzy caregivers, even after they rescue him from a potentially deadly encounter with a toothy, tree-dwelling slug during a hunt. In the middle of the night, he convinces his sister to leave the village with him so they can resume the search for their parents.

As they make their way through the forest, the humans are chased by a huge, wolf-like creature that nearly consumes them, until they take refuge in a tree trunk. The next morning, as the creature renews its interest in a meal, Deej and his sons attack and kill the beast. Mace searches the carcass and discovers a life-monitor bracelet identical to the ones worn by him and his sister, fueling his passion for finding his parents alive. Deej agrees to take up the search.

The Ewok consults a village shaman, Logray (also appearing in *Jedi*), who uses a magical spinning lantern to locate Jeremitt and Catarine. The

lantern confirms Mace's hopes; the two are alive but are being held captive by a Gorax, the same giant creature seen at the start of the film. Logray bequeaths individual gifts to the search party members – totems of legendary Ewok warriors – in order to instill qualities of hope, strength, and courage to the travelers. They likely need such encouragements, as tribal legends hold that no Ewok exploring the lands of the dreaded Gorax has returned alive.

Logray offers a pair of totems for two members of the party yet to be added: an ivory tooth and a crystal. Not only is Mace skeptical about such news, but he is also unappreciative of his gift from Logray, which appears to be a common-looking stone. Sporting the totems and accompanied by a team of pack animals, the four Ewoks and the Towani children head through the forest on their way to more desolate-looking lands.

Those seeking a connection to the greater *Star Wars* universe who look deep into the film – deeper, at least, than it may deserve – might find that connection in Logray, whose abilities could be viewed as less magical and more Force-attuned. Use of the Force has been described in such terms before: Han Solo derisively dismisses it as "a lot of simple tricks and nonsense" in *Star Wars*, and Luke Skywalker directs C-3PO to warn the Ewoks of the golden droid's "magic" abilities (in reality, Luke's exercise of the Force) in *Return of the Jedi*. Here, Logray could be tapping into the universal energy field himself to see events of afar, as well as to offer mystical assistance to the travelers. Then again, the small shaman could be faking it all and using the Force to cloud the search party members' minds into believing his tall tales. Regardless, they all seem instilled with a greater sense of purpose as a result.

Not long into their journey, the searchers are nearly crushed by a large, falling tree. Ewok woodsman Chukha-Trok reveals himself as the cutter of said tree, sending Mace into a rage. Claiming they do not need an addition to the party, Mace attempts to prove his skills as a warrior by flinging his axe into a tree. Chukha-Trok shows up the boy with his own toss of an axe, which embeds itself precisely into the end of Mace's axe handle. Deej awards the tooth totem to the woodsman and invites him along.

Mace's patience is tested again when the searchers meet Kaink, an Ewok priestess living on the edge of the forest. Deej is quick to offer her the crystal totem, to which she applies her innate magic, causing it to appear as

a lizard that scares Mace. Cindel is more accepting of Kaink's magic, which transforms the lizard into a cuddly ferret before resuming its crystalline appearance. Could Kaink also be a user of the Force here? Or is she simply a magician? Again, the viewer is offered a chance to tie the story back to the greater universe, but only from a certain point of view.

At this point, as a team of eight, they exit the forest and set foot across grassy plains, only to encounter more Force-like magic. Devoid of the variety of life forms evidently present in the moon's forests, the new environment presents its share of hazards to the team. A magic-infused pond lures Mace into touching his reflection, only to trap him underneath its shimmering surface until Wicket uses his walking-stick totem to pierce the watery barrier and rescue him. Ewok playfulness results in startling a horse that runs wild with Cindel trapped to its back, until Chukha-Trok halts the animal's panic.

While camping overnight, the party encounters a swarm of tiny, magical beings called Wisties. The playful, fairy-like creatures flutter and fly around the children of the search party, attracted by the youngsters' outbursts of laughter, as well as Cindel's candle totem. After the swarm disappears into the candle's flame, a lone Wistie remains behind to attract Mace's attention. He scoops her up and places her in his jacket pocket, in the process either naming the creature Izrina or somehow magically becoming aware that this was her name all along… that's never quite made clear. In a rare show of connection with his Ewok companions, Mace gratefully acknowledges that Wicket voluntarily separated himself from his mother and infant sister to help rescue Mace's parents.

The searchers ultimately reach the Gorax's castle abode, but are stymied by their inability to enter it. Someone suggests that Mace's totem rock may hold the key, but he admits his frustration got the better of him and he had tossed it away long ago. Wicket produces the rock, having witnessed Mace's rash action and retrieved it, secreting the totem away in case it was needed. Sure enough (and rather telegraphed), the rock proves to be more than it appears, containing an apparently enchanted arrowhead within its hollow interior (begging the question of why Logray didn't tell Mace this – was it a test of Mace's patience, or his own Force sensitivity, perhaps?). The arrowhead leads them to a tunnel opening blocked by fallen rocks, which

Mace destroys with energy bursts from his weakening blaster. The party enters the castle.

For their own safety, Cindel, Wicket, and Widdle stay behind, just inside the tunnel's opening, as the others press onward. The first obstacle the party encounter is a bottomless chasm, which they can cross only by climbing along a massive spider web. Their climbing arouses an Ewok-sized spider, which threatens Deej and Mace until it becomes hypnotized by Kaink's crystal-topped staff. Chukha-Trok uses his axe to cut away the web, dropping it and the spider into the chasm without apparent thought of how the searchers might again cross the gap on their way back.

The giant spider evidently survives its drop long enough to terrorize the trio (and, to hear tell of it even decades later, many of the young viewers tuning in) at the tunnel entrance, until Wicket stabs it in the cephalothorax, killing it.

Deeper inside, the search party finds the lair of the Gorax, as well as a cage suspended from the ceiling, just as foreseen in Logray's lantern. Suddenly, the Gorax returns and is distracted by a wildly running Weechee as the others plot to free the elder humans from their cage. With a bit of ingenuity and the Gorax's axe, Mace launches himself through the air to the cage, where he is tearfully reunited with his parents. Assuring them that the Ewoks are friends, Mace helps them descend from their prison.

But their escape is not quick enough, as the Gorax returns from chasing Weechee. Chukha-Trok charges forth, bravely attacking the giant's foot with his axe while Izrina the Wistie, freed from Mace's pocket, swoops and swirls about the monster's face to befuddle it. Enraged by both assaults, the giant pounds against the walls of its cave, triggering an avalanche of stones that pummel Chukha-Trok to the floor. A grief-stricken Mace rushes to the fallen Ewok's side, only to receive the gift of Chukha-Trok's axe as the latter's dying act.

The rescue party flees the lair with the Gorax in pursuit. They hastily devise an assault on multiple fronts: Jeremitt and the Ewoks pull tight a handwoven rope to trip the running giant as Kaink uses her staff to loosen a stalactite that strikes the Gorax on the head. As the behemoth reels from the blow, Catarine fires the final bolt from Mace's blaster, striking the Gorax in the chest and sending it into the inky abyss.

From across the chasm, Cindel and the young Ewoks appear to cheer the team's successful rescue efforts – only to fall victim to the Gorax's reemergence from the blackness. As he reaches out to swipe at them, Mace flings Chukha-Trok's axe and buries it in the center of the beast's back. The Gorax cries out and falls to its doom. Using strands of the spider's web, the survivors swing across the chasm to safety.

Back in the Ewok village, a celebration (recalling the end of *Return of the Jedi*) is in full swing, with food and dancing. Mace bids farewell to his Wistie friend (who, thankfully, holds no ill will at having been captured and stuffed in a pocket), and the humans and Ewoks are together and at peace. Finally, we are left with these words from the narrator: "Reunited, the families enjoy the simple pleasures of being together, having learned something they already knew: that courage, loyalty, and love are the strongest forces in the universe."

Directed by John Korty from a screenplay by Bob Carrau (based on a story by Lucas), *The Ewok Adventure* became that year's second-most watched movie for ABC. The following year, at the 37th Primetime Emmy Awards, it won the award for Outstanding Special Visual Effects – thanks, in part, to stop-motion animation work by Industrial Light and Magic, the visual effects company operating as a division of Lucasfilm. (It would be among the last stop-motion work performed at ILM.) The telefilm was nominated for Outstanding Children's Program, but lost to the PBS *American Playhouse* production of "The Displaced Person," based on a short story by Kurt Vonnegut.

As opposed to the big-screen films that inspired it, which have proven over the last few decades as enduringly entertaining for audiences of all ages, *The Ewok Adventure* clearly positions itself as a story for children in its opening scenes. A soothing voice-over by none other than actor and folksinger Burl Ives – whose narration of the holiday television classic *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* had entertained families for 20 years at that point – offers the needed background and plot explanations to guide a young viewer through more complicated aspects of the narrative. The Ewok characters provide light and playful moments throughout the film, whether scampering through the forests or challenging each other to impromptu wrestling matches, stirring up mischief, or simply being cute to watch.

The film itself is reasonably compelling in both visual and narrative senses. Plenty of new and interesting alien creatures abound in the movie to capture young imaginations, and the story moves at a steady enough pace to engage viewers. Action sequences offer tension that isn't overwhelmingly scary to youngsters (save for the arachnophobic), and characters experience positive growth and change as a result of their quest for togetherness. A child could do worse than to sit through *The Ewok Adventure*, particularly if that child has never seen *Return of the Jedi*.

A young viewer well-versed in *Jedi*, or the *Star Wars* universe in general, might not have as positive a response to *The Ewok Adventure*, however. Should that viewer be expecting characters and situations depicted in those previous films, the TV-movie offers precious few connectors.

The evil sorceress Charal (Siân Phillips) ransacks the Towani family cruiser and orphans the Towani children in *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor*.

Not only are Wicket, Logray, and Widdle the only three Ewoks from *Jedi* to appear in the film, but they are the only three characters from the entire *Star Wars* universe acknowledged at all. There are no mentions of the Galactic Empire's conflict with the Rebel forces of the Alliance to Restore the Republic; in fact, there is no indication of the existence of the Empire, period. There is no reference made to Jedi Knights, nor to the Force (directly), nor to any other aspect of the vast, engaging universe Lucas

created, unless it is rotund and furry. That could prove a disappointing experience for a young fan expecting a fuller extension of his or her experiences with *Star Wars* on film. But for those wanting simply, as indicated by the title, an Ewok adventure, the film delivers.

The Ewok Adventure's popularity prompted the production of a follow-up telemovie. *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor* was broadcast on ABC affiliates the night of 24 November 1985, just one day shy of a year after its predecessor, but now airing on the Sunday four days before Thanksgiving. Families tuning into that broadcast were tipped off immediately that the new film would differ in tone from the previous year's holiday offering, as it carried a parental discretion advisory owing to content children might find distressing.

As the film opens, months have passed on Endor's Forest Moon. Cindel (still sporting her Olivia Newton-John headband from *Caravan of Courage*) and Wicket have continued their friendship just as the girl's father, Jeremitt, evidently has continued his repair work on the family starcruiser. During a walk toward the Ewok village, Cindel mentions to Wicket that her family soon will be leaving their sanctuary moon, and they share their disappointment about their separation. Those concerns vanish as they reach the village and find it under attack by a band of tall, reptile-faced humanoid raiders. Wicket joins his fellow fuzzy natives in the battle for the village, as Cindel is alerted by her life-monitor bracelet that her mother is in danger of dying.

The girl rushes to where her brother, Mace, is using his blaster to help defend the village as their mother lay dying at his feet. Mace shoos Cindel away from the action, urging her to seek protection with their father. The advancing marauders prompt Mace to drag their mother out of the line of fire and into a hut, just before a blaster cannon round destroys it. Smoke and flames billowing over the forest canopy catch Cindel's attention. Fearing the worst, she glances at her bracelet to see that the glowing life lights representing her mother and brother have gone dark.

Back at his space vehicle, Jeremitt faces the apparent leader of the marauding band, Terak, and a human-looking sorceress (or Force adept, or nascent Sith Lord, or something) named Charal. The two declare that they have come seeking "the power," and order a group of the raiders to ransack the starcruiser in search of it, while offering no other explanation of what

form this power might be in. Amid Jeremitt's insistence that he has nothing of the sort, a raider emerges carrying a vacuum flask-sized energizer, presumably providing power to the ship's engines. When Cindel arrives, Jeremitt lashes out against the raiders and flees with the child – but not before he is shot in the back. Charal twists a ring on her finger, unleashing the magic necessary to transform herself into a raven. She then flies in pursuit of the humans.

Hiding in the forest, Cindel tells her father that the rest of their family has died at the hands of the marauders. Jeremitt explains that he needs her to seek refuge with the Ewoks; his injury assures him that he will be unable to protect her any longer. The Charal raven arrives, prompting Jeremitt to rush Cindel on her way. As she runs, Charal flies in pursuit and Jeremitt is killed in a final firefight with the raiders.

Cindel returns to the village only to discover that the raid is over and the Ewoks have lost; every structure is in splinters or on fire (which may explain why they live in the trees by the time of *Return of the Jedi*), and surviving Ewoks are being herded into wagon cages. One bright spot for the girl is that she is placed in the same wagon as her beloved Wicket, and she tells him that her entire family died at the hands of the raiders. Wicket assures her that his tribe will care for her herein as they depart toward an undeclared destination.

If nothing else, the opening minutes of *The Battle for Endor* secure Cindel's status among the most traumatized central characters of any *Star Wars* story. Her experiences certainly compare to Luke Skywalker's discovery of the charred remains of his aunt and uncle, as well as Princess Leia's witnessing the destruction of her home planet Alderaan, delivered by the Death Star – even though Luke and Leia were both 19 at the time and Cindel is only five years old. Yet the youngster proves resilient for the moment.

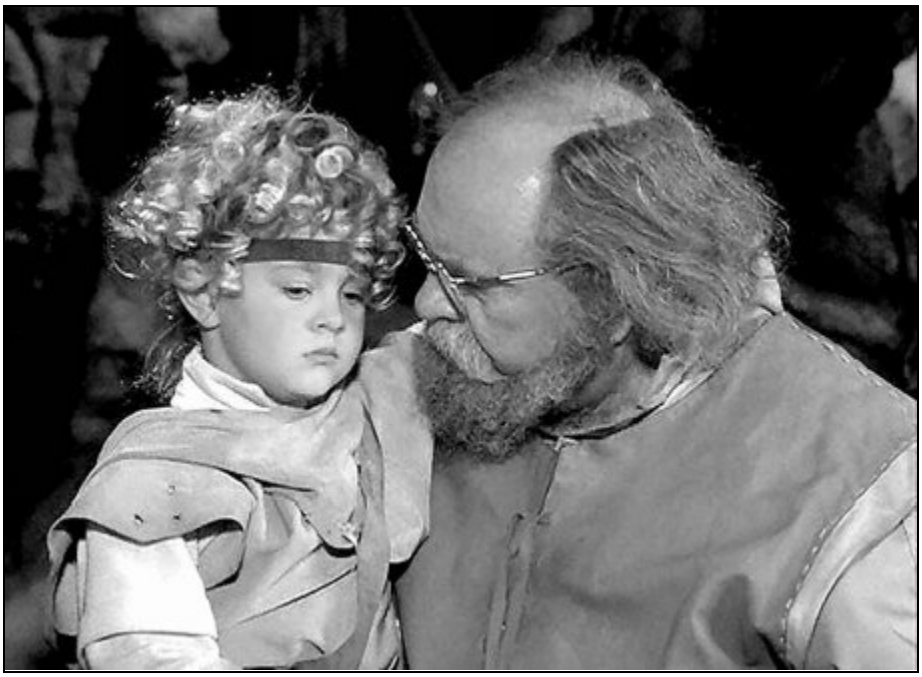
As the wagons drag onward, loose floorboards encourage several Ewoks to rip them up and create an escape hatch – but one that will accommodate only the smallest among them. Cindel and Wicket slip through the floor and into the forest, but not without catching the attention of a pair of guards, who follow them into the trees. The escapees navigate the forest to a mountain, where they proceed to climb its face and enter a cave. The raiders close in on the pair and, in their enthusiasm, shoot their

blasters at the cave entrance, triggering a landslide that not only sweeps the guards off of the mountain to their doom, but also blocks the path that the two youngsters used to enter. Their only exit is an opening to a sheer mountain face high above the forest.

Ever resourceful, Wicket fashions an escape plan by gathering detritus strewn about the cave and using it to build a skin glider. The young Ewok then explores deeper within the cave and awakens a man-sized flying reptile, which attacks the pair. As they attempt to fend it off, the creature snatches Cindel and flies from the cave. Wicket takes to the sky with his glider and rescues the girl, gliding them safely to the forest floor, where they rest for the night.

The pair are startled awake by Teek, a furry, Ewok-sized rodent able to run at impossibly fast speeds. While Wicket initially distrusts Teek, Cindel convinces him that the creature is a new friend who can lead them to safety. Teek takes them to a seemingly abandoned cabin filled with items ranging from useful bedding and cooking equipment to an apparent hoarding of junk. Cindel suggests that they use the cabin for their home, and the three begin to prepare a meal there.

Before their food is ready to eat, an elderly human arrives at the door. The man, Noa Briqualon, announces himself as the owner of the cabin and tosses the new pair outside before they can eat their prepared food. Noa decides to eat the food with Teek, who apparently shares the cabin with the man. The displaced youngsters set up a campfire near the cabin. Teek uses his super speed to sneak food to them without Noa seeing. Later, the old man invites them into the cabin to sleep, even giving up his own bed after Cindel experiences a nightmare of the village raid. But the man reverts to form in the morning and instructs the pair to be on their way. Wicket tells Cindel that he wants to find his family, so the two start their search.



Cindel seeks comfort from kindly curmudgeon Noa Briqualon (Wilford Brimley).

Worth noting at this point is the elimination of a language barrier between humans and Ewoks that was present in *Return of the Jedi*, which takes place after the telefilms. While Wicket seems capable of using and understanding words taught to him by Cindel, he is later unable – or, at least, uninterested – in applying this knowledge to his conversations with Leia, C-3PO, and other humanoids in *Jedi*. (In response to fans pointing this out, Lucasfilm continuity representatives have cleverly suggested that Cindel speaks a language different from Basic, the tongue spoken by other beings in the *Star Wars* universe; each simply has been translated into English for the benefit of Earthly viewers.) Also to Cindel's distinct advantage, Wicket and the other Ewoks appear not to harbor the interest in eating humans that they showed toward roasting Han Solo alive in *Return of the Jedi*; admittedly, such an interest would have made for a much shorter first film.

Back at his stone fortress, Terak watches Charal's unsuccessful attempts to access the power stored within the device taken from the starcruiser. He threatens her life if she remains unable to grant his wish for the power. Charal laments that their task would have been easier had the raiders not lost Cindel in the forest, and Terak villainously shouts in rage that he wants the child brought to him immediately.

Noa returns to the cabin with bedding for Cindel and Wicket, but then declares to Teek that he is relieved they have left for good. Just then, the pair returns with berries that Cindel says she will use to bake pies. She does, and the four feast on her desserts before going to sleep for the night. The next morning, Noa leaves the cabin, prompting Wicket and Cindel to follow him rather than do the chores he requested of them.

They discover a disabled starcruiser even larger than the one that stranded Cindel and her family. As they snoop around the site, Wicket trips an alarm that brings Noa out of the ship, very upset that he was followed. Noa explains that he, too, was stranded on the Forest Moon of Endor when he was younger. He had been traveling with a friend, Salak Weet,[138] when the ship malfunctioned and was damaged in the crash. Salak had ventured into the forest in search of materials to repair the starcruiser, but had never returned. Noa was thus forced to make a life for himself on the moon. The three return to Noa's cabin for the night and comfort each other with the knowledge that they all know the hard feelings of loss.

Unbeknownst to them all, however, the sorceress Charal has located Cindel in Noa's cabin. The next morning, she lures Cindel outside with calls and singing that Cindel mistakes for her mother's voice. Cindel sees a woman in white near a stream, with a white horse. As the girl approaches, the two speak before Charal reveals herself from the disguise and kidnaps Cindel. (One might argue that Charal's demonstration of such mind-clouding powers is the closest act to true Force wielding depicted in either movie.) Noa and Wicket, who had sensed danger and awakened the old man, arrive in time to see Cindel slung over the back of Charal's horse as it carries the pair into the distance. They return to Noa's cabin to equip themselves for the pursuit and head out, followed by Teek.

Upon their arrival at the castle, Charal gives the child over to Terak, who orders Cindel to unlock the secret of the power source. Cindel asks about the fate of the Ewoks captured from the village. Terak claims they are there in the castle as his guests, and that no harm will come to them if she cooperates by using her magic. She claims to know nothing of magic, which prompts Terak to imprison her as well as Charal, from whom he strips the transformation ring. In their cells, Charal tries to extract information from Cindel about the power source. The child explains that it is a mere component of the starcruiser. Charal discloses to Cindel that Terak

once killed a human whom he believed controlled similar power: Noa's friend Salak.

Wicket, Noa, and Teek arrive at Terak's castle, gaining entry via a grappling hook, despite the best efforts of a few guards. They make quick work of finding the caged Ewoks, as well as Cindel and Charal, outwit the pair of raiders guarding them, and release them all – except for the sorceress, of course.

A guard discovers the escape and raises an alarm, bringing the entire castle's complement to bear on them. Noa shoots a hole in the castle wall and uses his grappling hook to create a zip-line to the ground. As Wicket starts shooting at approaching guards, Cindel quickly explains Salak's death to Noa. She also points out the power supply from her family's starcruiser, which Noa takes as the captives all escape the castle.

Terak visits Charal's cell intent on killing her, but she counters by telling of the existence of Noa's starcruiser. He allows her to use her ring once more, but grabs it back after she again turns into a raven. Terak then rallies his forces for a second attack on the Ewok village, with Charal flying ahead. Terak's raiders and the Ewok escapees arrive at the village simultaneously. As the Ewoks take on the humanoids, Noa and Cindel rush ahead to his ship with the power supply, which Noa prepares for launch. Even with a valiant fight, the raiders overpower the Ewoks and reach the site of Noa's crashed ship. The old man surprises the attackers with his operational blaster turrets.

When Cindel rushes from the ship to aid Wicket in the attack, she is captured by Terak, who offers to trade her safe return for the power supply. Noa emerges from the ship and challenges Terak to a one-on-one fight, despite his need to use his walking stick against Terak's sword. As the two come to blows, Cindel urges Wicket to use a sling against Terak. The Ewok's slung rock strikes Charal's magic ring as it hangs from Terak's neck. The ring erupts in power, turning Terak into stone and ash. Charal, now apparently trapped in raven form, flies away.

The marauding Terak (Carel Struycken) will stop at nothing to acquire the power supply from the Towani family's star cruiser.

Finally, after a heartfelt farewell to Wicket, Teek, and the native Ewoks, Noa and Cindel board his starcruiser and leave the Forest Moon for outer space.

Written and directed by brothers Jim and Ken Wheat from a story by Lucas, *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor* has proven more popular with fans than its cutesy predecessor. Despite the surprisingly grim path that the story initially takes with the deaths of Cindel's parents and brother, as well as the decimation of the Ewok village, the film does lighten up eventually, thanks mostly to Teek's interactions with Wicket and Cindel. Wilford Brimley plays Noa with warmth always trying to peek out from behind his crusty exterior, a quality certain to appeal to younger viewers.

The movie has its share of action in the form of firefights, as well as hand-to-hand fighting. Seven-foot-tall Dutch actor Carel Struycken (later of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Twin Peaks*, and *The Addams Family* fame) strikes a menacing form as Terak, and all of the reptilian marauders offer credible threats to the Ewok and human heroes from a child's perspective (certainly more than anything in the prior film). The flora and fauna of Endor also seem more perilous in this tale, given its glimpses of flying

lizards, dinosaur-like pack animals, and water-frothing voracious moat swimmers.

But once again, the film's successes in entertaining children far surpass those in engaging a *Star Wars* fan seeking a more immersive return to a galaxy far, far away. Wicket is the sole character from the feature films to be seen in this television production, with Chief Chirpa, Teebo, Paploo, Nicki, Warok, and other Ewoks from *Jedi* nowhere to be seen.

Apart from Cindel, any appearances by the handful of characters brought over from *The Ewok Adventure* are slight. Deej, Wicket's father, is glimpsed a few times either running or fighting alongside his fellow Ewoks, without any mention of his name or relationship to the film's young hero, and Shodu and Willy can also be spotted. Mace has a handful of lines in only a single scene, during which his mother is already unconscious. Jeremitt, recast with *The Breakfast Club*'s Paul Gleason for this production, has the most screen time of them all, and even he is killed during the opening minutes.

As with the previous film, no mention is made of any other element of the cinematic stories – no Empire, no Rebellion, nothing. While the Force again is not mentioned by name, magic is even more pervasive in this second outing. Such displays of living energy might perhaps have their connection to the Force binding the galaxy together that is wielded by Jedi Knights and Sith Lords alike; there is no evidence to the contrary.

Several characters created for the films have made additional appearances in publications and multimedia productions within the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe. Charal's capacity to manipulate magical powers is explained by author Kevin J. Anderson in 1997's *The Illustrated Star Wars Universe*. She is described as a Nightsister, part of a sect of Force-sensitive witches from Dathomir, which were created by Dave Woolverton for his 1994 novel *The Courtship of Princess Leia*.[139] Anderson's *Jedi Academy Trilogy* also features a cameo by a Gorax, as do Dark Horse Comics' *Star Wars Tales* #22 and *X-Wing: Rogue Leader* #1.

In addition, a number of Ewok characters from these films, as well as Charal and the Wisties, appear in Dark Horse's one-shot *Ewoks—Shadows of Endor*. Interestingly, the 2013 comic, written by Zack Giallongo and connecting the telefilms with the *Ewoks* cartoons, occurs prior to *Caravan of Courage*.

The online role-playing game *Star Wars Galaxies*, as well as sources for the traditionally run *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, each mention Terak and his band of marauders, identified as refugees from the planet Sanyassa IV who became stranded on Endor's moon after a crash landing (as the *Ewoks* cartoons and comics would soon show, the moon seems to end up with a *lot* of stranded beings from other worlds). Those same cartoons would also feature a number of characters who showed up in the two television movies, including Wicket's parents Deej and Shodu, his brothers Widdle and Weechee, his sister Winda, Kaink, Chukha-Trok, and Izrina. Teek, meanwhile, shows up again in *Star Tours*.

Most notably, Cindel Towani is depicted as having grown to adulthood and become a journalist on the planet Coruscant, in Michael P. Kube-McDowell's novel *Tyrant's Test*, the final book in his trilogy *The Black Fleet Crisis.* Cindel reports on an attack survivor in such a way as to garner support among the citizens of the New Republic. She is said to have been inspired to take up her career after witnessing the Battle of Endor as depicted in *Return of the Jedi*. Each of these characters could simply have existed within the context of the Ewok telefilms, but for whatever personal reasons held by these creators, they found life beyond their source material.

Narratively, the Ewok films conjure enough tropes from children's literature to feel familiar and satisfying to many young viewers. While the first movie harkens thoughts of Jack and the Beanstalk combined with Peter Pan (complete with Ewoks as animal-pelted Lost Boys and an ersatz Tinkerbell in the form of a Wistie companion), the second exists (as admitted by Lucas himself) as a spin on *Heidi*, the Swiss tale of a young girl and her hermit grandfather that was nearly a century old at the time of the first TV movie's production.

When it comes to the question of why these films continue to endure in the hearts and minds of *Star Wars* fans (which they clearly do, given the excitement generated by Cindel's return as an adult journalist, as well as by *Shadows of Endor*), various forces seem to be at work. Nostalgia certainly is a factor, given that any viewer of the films' original telecasts below the age of ten is in his or her 30s today. Those individuals may look back fondly on those experiences and, as a result, choose to share the films now with their own children. Live-action space fantasy films aimed directly at

kids are few and far between, so the Ewok movies remain near the top of any list of safe and reasonably entertaining examples of the genre.

Whether these films “belong” in the *Star Wars* universe likely will remain a subject of discussion among fans for many years to come. Inarguably, any appeal these two movies have today is a testament to the power of the *Star Wars* universe – even a sliver of it – to engage imaginations and delight viewers at even the youngest of ages.

In Trouble Again: The Joys and Woes of *Ewoks* and *Droids*

by Jean-François Boivin

A long time ago, in the mid-1980s…

With no further movies on the horizon after *Return of the Jedi*, Lucasfilm needed to create more *Star Wars* stories to maintain interest and gain new followers, and television would be the next medium through which to present them. Lucasfilm had ventured into the world of TV animation with "The Faithful Wookiee," the animated segment of *The Star Wars Holiday Special*, which had aired on CBS on 17 November 1978. Characters like the Ewoks and R2-D2 appealed to young children; thus, the target audience was determined for two TV movies, two cartoon series titled *Ewoks* and *Star Wars: Droids – The Adventures of R2-D2 and C-3PO* (hereafter referred to as *Droids*), and a whole slew of spinoff toys and books. This would become an international experiment in trying to keep a franchise alive, but the results turned out not to be entirely successful. When *Star Wars* regained popularity in the early '90s with the shared Expanded Universe, it took a long time before the stories and elements from either animated series would be incorporated.

Lead-In

During the months following *Return of the Jedi*'s release, Lucasfilm started an Ewok licensing program, offering a line of toys and accessories aimed at preschoolers, from several licensees bearing the "Wicket the Ewok" logo. This was a precursor to the *Ewoks* animated show, as some of

these products introduced characters and concepts that would later appear in the cartoon, alongside the film's Wicket W. Warrick and Teebo characters. Their Ewok friends Latara and Princess Kneesaa, their pet bordok Baga, and Woklings named Wiley, Nippet, Gwig, Leeni, and Mookiee were revealed in various products, including stuffed figures, coloring books, and playsets from Kenner, a board game from Parker Brothers, puzzles and a watercolor painting set from Craft Master, Presto Magix transfers, a Sit 'n Spin, coin banks, roller skates, a plate, bowl and mug set, and a long list of apparel for indoor and outdoor play which have since become collectibles.

This line of toys sparked enough interest in the characters from young children that Lucasfilm soon planned to bring them to the small screen. In April 1984, pre-production began for an Ewok TV movie to air later that year. The following month, George Lucas held a production meeting[140] during which the basic outlines for two animated series were laid out: one based on the cute teddy bears of Endor and the other on the Laurel and Hardy of the galaxy far, far away, R2-D2 and C-3PO. Attending the meeting was newly chosen executive producer Miki Herman, a long-time Lucasfilm associate and the unit production manager for *Return of the Jedi*. For the animation, Lucasfilm again partnered with Canadian company Nelvana, Inc., fresh off the adult animated feature *Rock & Rule*, which had worked on the *Holiday Special* six years prior.

The two series aired back to back for a period of 13 weeks, with a primetime hour-long special titled *The Great Heep* shown at the tail end; Bob Carrau and Paul Dini handled the bulk of the *Ewoks* scripts, while Nelvana writer Peter Sauder wrote the first eight scripts of *Droids* (and also served as associate producer, along with Dini), with the remaining episodes based on stories by *Star Wars* veterans Joe Johnston and Ben Burtt. The shows premiered the following year on ABC-TV (which "laid out a lot of money to Lucasfilm Ltd. for '*The Ewoks-Droids Adventure Hour*'"[141]), the network that had aired *The Making of Star Wars* documentary in 1977. The extended 16-month period between production meeting and airdate was a rare luxury, and would benefit both shows.

But that was all taking place behind the scenes. What Ewoks fans (was there really such a thing?) would experience first that year, storytelling-wise, would be six storybooks released by Random House, sporting the *Return of the Jedi* logo. These stories, which chronicle the adventures of

Chief Chirpa's tribe, revealed a sneak peek at some more characters and situations that would appear in the *Ewoks* cartoon. But since these were being released more than a year before the show's debut, the character designs were not yet finalized, so the Ewoks in those early releases look like a cross between their quasi-realistic movie versions and the stylized animated design.

Storybooks by Random House heralded the coming of animated droids and Ewoks. Pictured above: several titles in the series, both published and unpublished.

The first book to be released, on 31 May 1984, was *How the Ewoks Saved the Trees: An Old Ewok Legend*. Written by James Howe and illustrated by Walter Velez, this 44-page hardcover introduced the concept of the Forest Moon's ancient trees being sentient, and able to communicate with intelligent beings. The book contained a heavy environmental message, which would also come up in some episodes of the show, but the concept of worshipping talking trees must have been foreign to most young readers.

The following month saw the release of *The Adventures of Teebo: A Tale of Magic and Suspense*, by Joe Johnston, who wrote and illustrated the 44-page hardcover book (with cover art by Jan Brett). Johnston was a long-time Lucasfilm associate, as he was one of the concept artists of the original *Star Wars* trilogy (he also wrote the sketchbooks for each movie, published by Ballantine Books) and served as the art director for the second and third movies, as well as for the first two *Indiana Jones* films (*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* had just been released theatrically a month before the book). Johnston would move to the position of production designer on both Ewok TV movies (the first of which was shooting at the time of the book's

release) before becoming an accomplished movie director. His other contribution to the *Ewoks* and *Droids* spinoffs would be as a co-writer of the *Droids* episode "Coby and the Starhunters." All of these credentials made him a sort of expert on George Lucas's universe.

Johnston centers his story on Teebo and the tribe of Happy Grove, and introduces the Ewoks' rivals, the Duloks, led by King Vulgarr, and other creatures that would feature on the TV series, such as Yuzzums and a mantigrue. It has been cited[142] by *Ewoks* writer and story editor Paul Dini as having been taken into account for the show. While a very well-written and entertaining book, it contains notions of Duloks skinning and eating baby Ewoks, and thus might not be the best bedtime story for children.

On the same day, 28 June 1984, Random House released a series of "four mini-storybooks starring the lovable Ewoks"[143] in the same format as 1983's *The Star Wars Book about Flight* and *Star Wars: C-3PO's Book about Robots*. The 32-page books, illustrated by Pat Paris (who had also provided the artwork for *The 1984 Ewok Calendar*), were titled *The Baby Ewoks' Picnic Surprise* and *Wicket Finds a Way*, by Melinda Luke; *Three Cheers for Kneesaa!*, by Jane E. Gerver; and *The Ewoks' Hang-Gliding Adventure*, by Judy Herbstman. All four stories chronicle short adventures in the lives of the young Ewoks, each taking place during different seasons or around holidays.

Later that year, on 25 November 1984, *The Ewok Adventure* aired on ABC (with a corresponding storybook adaptation in early 1985), and had eight- to 14-year-olds all over North America glued to their TV set, pushing "record" on their family's VCR, or listening to the simulcast on radio. This was a full-length TV movie directed by John Korty, written by Bob Carrau (one of the two writers for the upcoming *Ewoks* animated series) from a story by George Lucas himself, and starring some of the actors from *Return of the Jedi*, who returned to play their Ewok film roles. It introduced some new characters that would be part of the animated show, including Wicket's parents Deej and Shodu, his brothers Widdle (renamed Willie in the cartoon) and Weechee, his baby sister Winda, the Ewok priestess Kaink, woodsman Chukha-Trok, and Izrina, queen of the Wisties. The movie received a theatrical release in Europe and Japan, and was retitled *Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure* in the United Kingdom, as well as for

home distribution (more information about the Ewok films is provided elsewhere in this volume).

In January 1985, Marvel Comics, which had been publishing a monthly *Star Wars* series since before the first movie hit theaters in 1977, began producing an *Ewoks* series as part of the launch of its new Star Comics imprint. The new children-oriented line, edited by Harvey Comics veteran Sid Jacobson, initially had a planned launch date of September 1984[144] for the first 10 series, a mix of licensed properties and original characters including *Planet Terry*, *Fraggle Rock*, *Top Dog*, and *Heathcliff*. But the initial wave was delayed, with the first six titles being released instead in December, and the other four (which included *Ewoks* #1) the following month. The first four bi-monthly issues of *Ewoks* were released from late January to late July 1985, before the first episode aired. This early release may account for the fact that no villains or creatures from the show appear in the series until issue #8, and why writer Dave Manak and artist Warren Kremer had to create their own challenges for the main Ewoks, which consisted of the ogre Gantu, Captain Krag and the Zorbian space pirates, King Marlox of the evil Quork race, and exiled Ewok Graak. The series continued during and after the animated show aired, and a *Droids* series was even added to the Star Comics lineup – but more about that later.

On the Air

The two series were first announced in spring 1985, in such publications as *Bantha Tracks* and *Starlog*. The night before the series debuted, *The ABC Saturday Sneak Peek & Fun Fit Test* aired at 8:30 p.m., hosted by Tony Danza, gold-medal Olympic champion Mary Lou Retton, C-3PO (Anthony Daniels), and R2-D2. In it, Retton gave a “Fun Fit Test” to young viewers, to preview her five-minute *ABC Fun Fit* show. But the main attraction was that the half-hour special offered previews of the network’s new cartoon lineup, including *The 13 Ghosts of Scooby-Doo*, *The Super Powers Team: Galactic Guardians*, and *Ewoks and Droids Adventure Hour*.

The first installment of *Ewoks and Droids Adventure Hour* aired on ABC-TV on 7 September 7, 1985, at 8:00 a.m. CST. Kicking off the series was the *Ewoks* episode “The Cries of the Trees,” followed by *Droids*' “The White Witch.” Viewers were plunged into a world of wonder, with exciting

villains like Morag the Tulgah Witch and gangster's son Tig Fromm. That same day, *The Ewok Adventure* movie won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Visual Effects[145] (the *37th Primetime Emmy Awards* would be broadcast on the same network on 22 September) but sadly, this would not be a good omen for the animated shows.

The main characters and time period for each series were chosen to avoid interfering with any future *Star Wars* movie sequels or prequels, with *Droids* being set 15 years[146] before their encounter with Luke Skywalker, and *Ewoks* shortly prior to the the second Death Star's construction and the two Ewok TV movies. *Ewoks*, directed by Raymond Jafelice with unit director Dale Schott, presented a complete story each week in half-hour episodes, "although there are elements that link certain episodes together," executive producer Miki Herman told *Bantha Tracks* in 1985.[147]

The *Droids* series, directed by Ken Stephenson with unit director David Thrasher, was laid out as three stories[148] of four episodes apiece, such that the droids would be with a different master in each one. Even though there was an arc to the stories, single episodes were presented as "a complete whole entity, without it being a cliffhanger," Herman said, "and yet the four of them together tell one big story." But since there were 13 episodes, the last one produced, "Coby and the Starhunters," would be tagged on at the tail end of the middle "Mon Julpa" story arc, so it became the only five-parter. For *Ewoks*, the lack of a continuous storyline allowed writers to play around more with the order of episodes: based on production drawings, "The Haunted Village" was apparently supposed to come first, but was aired as the second episode (switching places with "The Cries of the Trees"), and "Asha" was production #11 and aired as episode #13 (swapping slots with "Blue Harvest").

All the chances were on Lucasfilm's side: the shows presented a nice contrast, which expanded the chances of their catching viewer interest. *Ewoks* had a magical, fairy-tale quality full of natural colors, while *Droids* had a colder and brighter technological style. "One show is about community life in the forests of Endor," Herman told *Bantha Tracks*. "Another is about two friends – C-3PO and R2-D2 – and their various masters on different worlds." A higher than industry-standard budget ($300,000 per episode[149]) and a love for George Lucas's movies allowed

for “better animation and better acting and character work” than most of the current shows at the time; each half-hour episode contained “about twenty thousand cells,” creating a finer and richer animation “more in the classical tradition of animation.”

Well-known names in the music industry wrote catchy songs for the opening credits: Taj and Inshira Mahal for *Ewoks*, and Stuart Copeland (from The Police) and Derek Holt for *Droids*, while music scores were composed by Patricia Cullen and David Shaw. Anthony Daniels reprised his role as the voice of C-3PO, while Ben Burtt provided the sound effects on *Droids*, which added an air of legitimacy that this was set in the beloved *Star Wars* universe. Additionally, both shows brought back familiar characters and ships from the movies: *Droids* had Boba Fett, IG-88, the Max Rebo Band, R5-D4, a Gamorrean pirate, TIE fighters, an Imperial shuttle, a desert skiff, A-wings, and B-wings; *Ewoks*, meanwhile, featured Wicket, Paploo, Teebo, Chirpa, Logray, and an off-screen appearance by the Emperor himself, as well as characters from *The Ewok Adventure*, mentioned earlier.

The shows also displayed genuine emotions and a healthy dose of humor, emphasizing the virtues of friendship and loyalty. C-3PO and R2-D2 were inseparable and very loyal to their various masters. Their owners were diverse in their occupations: Thall Joben and Jord Dusat were mechanics and speeder racers, Jann Tosh worked in his uncle’s mines, and Mungo Baobab was a merchant. They encountered colorful characters and visited interesting planets: Kybo Ren and his pirate gang from the water planet Tarnoonga; Tig Fromm and his henchmen (and droids) serving the Fromm family of gangsters from Annoo; the evil vizier Zatec-Cha, who wanted to usurp Tammuz-an’s throne from its rightful king, Mon Julpa; and the ambitious Governor Koong of Roon’s Tawntoom province, who tried to convince Imperial Admiral Screed to make his planet part of the Empire.

The Ewoks, meanwhile, had a close-knit sense of family and community, a respect for nature, and a connection with the environment, animals, and most of their neighbors (including Phlogs, Gupins, Jindas, Tromes, Ketes, Skandits, and the Rock Wizard.) One example, and probably the best and most touching episode of *Ewoks*’ first season, was the last to air: “Asha” tells the tale of Chief Chirpa’s long-lost daughter, and of Kneesaa’s arduous trek through the winter snow to search for her missing

sister after Wicket reports encountering a feral Ewok who was raised by korrinas and is terrorizing Dulok maramu-hunters. The reunion of the two sisters, when one was thought dead for years, is very emotional, as is Asha's decision to abandon her beloved animals and go back to the Ewok village.

ABC's Broadcast Standards and Practices didn't allow for hero characters to be killed, only stunned or knocked down as long as they showed signs of immediate recovery. Bad guys could be dispatched, but off-screen and without violence, and were not permitted to carry and use guns, or to fling edged weapons. That's why, in the show, stormtroopers carry stun pikes, and heroes use palm stunners and remote-like stunner blasters. Most villains are droids and robots, which could be dispatched with less consequence than living beings. The character Gaff, a humanoid insect with sharp poisonous spikes on his arms, is only shown coming toward his victims, who fall unconscious in the next shot, and this is probably the edgiest attack concept from the entire show. Adult Ewoks and Duloks never carry spears, but rather staffs, sheathed stone swords, and bows without arrows.

To this day, both series hold up very well. The stories (summaries of which space does not allow here, but the excellent episode guide from 1988's *Starlog Yearbook* Vol. 3 is highly recommended) are extremely entertaining, and the characters, designs, animation styles, and voice acting are all very endearing. All of the elements seemed in place to ensure success in the ratings. So it is puzzling as to why the shows didn't catch on at the time, with *Droids* being cancelled after only one season due to low ratings, and *Ewoks*' format being completely reworked for a second season that was even less successful.

One of the main reasons was the stiff Saturday-morning competition, with shows such as *Smurfs* (NBC) and *Muppet Babies* (CBS) gaining higher ratings. In fact, according to an article in the 14-20 September 1985 issue of *TV Guide*, "NBC's little blue trolls have knocked off the air ABC's *Mighty Orbots*, *Turbo Teen* and *Rubik the Amazing Cube*," and sadly the *Star Wars* spinoffs didn't fare any better. Another reason might be that the youngsters who had loved the *Star Wars* movies two to eight years prior might have outgrown the cartoon-watching stage. The show's popularity was certainly not helped by "The Ewoks and the Magic Sunberries" musical number of

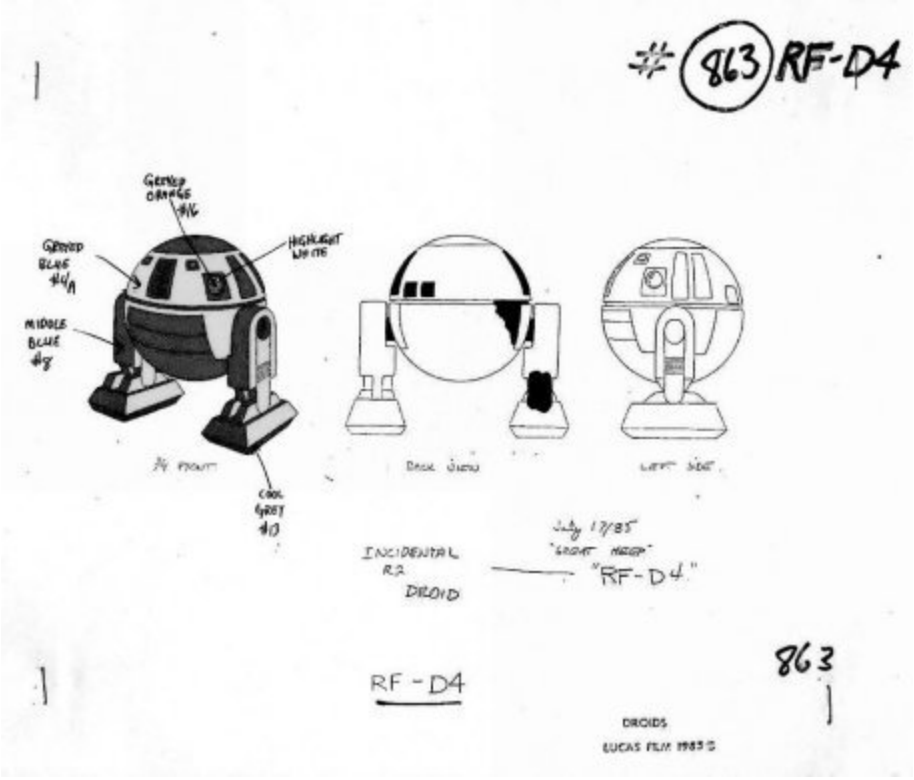
the Ice Capades' *Brand America: Bold-Bright-Beautiful* show, which premiered on 29 January 1986[150] at Madison Square Garden, an event which deserves to remain in obscurity. Signs of trouble were apparent early on, and ABC was forced to change the time slot, first to 8:30 in November, and then to 9:30 in March of the following year with re-runs. But even that didn't help the ratings.

The day after the penultimate episode of *Ewoks and Droids Adventure Hour*, on Sunday, 24 November 1985, the live-action *Ewoks: Battle for Endor* aired at night on ABC. The movie is more depressing than the previous year's *The Ewok Adventure*, with little Cindel's parents and brother being killed early on, and a group of Ewoks being captured by King Terak and his Marauders, implying that the rest of the Ewok village was decimated. Tonally, it seemed the complete opposite of the cheerful Saturday-morning cartoon.

Two months after the shows premiered on TV, Random House started releasing a series of spinoff storybooks for young readers, each adapting select episodes. 12 November 1985, saw the release of hardcovers *Wicket and the Dandelion Warriors*, by Larry Weinberg and illustrated by Deborah Colvin Borgo, and *The Lost Prince*, by Ellen Weiss and illustrated by Amador. On 19 May 1986, two hardcovers and two smaller softcovers were released: *The Pirates of Tarnoonga*, by Ellen Weiss and illustrated by Carter Concepts, Inc. (for which future comic book writer and artist Chuck Austen[151] was working at the time), and *The Shadow Stone*, by Cathy East Dubowski and illustrated by Borgo, in the first format; *Escape from the Monster Ship*, by Bonnie Bogart and illustrated by Amador, and *The Red Ghost*, by Melinda Luke and illustrated again by Borgo, in the second.

The publisher also released some activity books: two *Star Wars* "Touch Me" books, thick cardboard publications featuring "Things to Touch, See, and Smell," with new stories written by Virginia Holt titled *Fuzzy As an Ewok*, illustrated by the prolific Debbie Borgo, and *Shiny As a Droid*, illustrated by Feito (on 5 May 1986), as well as *Ewoks Winter Fun: A Dot-to-Dot Book*, also illustrated by Borgo (in September, the same month in which *Ewoks*' second season began airing). No account of sales figures for those books can be confirmed, but they are very well-produced and should be considered part of any good *Star Wars* book collection.

The one-hour *Droids* special titled *The Great Heep* was originally slated for a Friday-night airing on 13 December 1985, two weeks after the weekly series had ended, but was pushed back to the following summer. It was shown on Saturday, 7 June 1986, at 9:30 a.m. Inexplicably, this double-length episode was aired out of sequence, as it features the droid duo's first meeting with their new master, Mungo Baobab, and is a prequel to the series' last four episodes. If any viewers wondered where this Mungo guy suddenly came from in "Tail of the Roon Comets," they finally had their long-awaited answer. However, being the first part of a story arc made it perfect as a standalone special, since it was a complete story in itself.



A concept sketch for RF-D4, as pictured in the *Droids* episode "The Great Heep."

The Great Heep, scripted by Ben Burtt and directed by Nelvana co-founder Clive A. Smith, explores the effects of the Empire exploiting the resources of a peaceful planet named Biitu, by installing a "moisture eater tower" over a fuel ore mine, which creates a drought throughout the thriving farm colony. The installation is guarded by a gigantic droid named Heep (voiced by Long John Baldry) who consumes astromech droids, which are kept in a droid "harem" and are served to him by a droid waiter, to recharge the behemoth. The mining is performed by slave droids, and the

dryness prevents all of the slaves and the overseer droid alike from rusting. Despite being entertaining and presenting a lot of colorful characters (particularly the cyborg Imperial Admiral Screed), the special was the second lowest-rated of the summer[152], possibly due to a lack of publicity and the fact that it aired during a random week in the regular timeslot for *Ewoks and Droids Adventure Hour* reruns.

Despite the low ratings, the producers did what they could to continue on, and pre-production began on a second season of *Ewoks* at the end of 1985. Retitled *The All-New Ewoks*, the series aired from 13 September[153] to 13 December 1986, at 10:30 a.m., with a brand-new title sequence and opening theme, as well as a slight format change: out of the season's 13 new episodes, nine consisted of two shorter, 15-minute stories separated by a commercial break. As with the first season, the bulk of the new episodes were written by either Bob Carrau or Paul Dini (who also served as story editor), while the rest were scripted by Michael Reaves ("The Raich" and "Hard Sell"), Linda Woolverton ("Gone with the Mimphs" and "Baga's Rival"), associate producer Michael Dubil ("A Warrior and a Lurdo" and "Just My Luck"), Earl Kress ("Bringing Up Norky," co-written by Carrau), and Stephen Langford ("Malani the Warrior," the episode produced and aired last). All of them were directed by Dale Schott, the unit director on the first season, while original director Raymond Jafelice was now the storyboard director.

Note that on top of writing episodes for a multitude of animated series, including scripting the *Droids* episode "Tail of the Roon Comets," Michael Reaves would later write or co-write several *Star Wars* novels and short stories, including *The Phantom Menace* prequel *Darth Maul: Shadow Hunter*, the Clone Wars-era *MedStar* duology (with Steve Perry), and the *Coruscant Nights* trilogy and its follow-up, *The Last Jedi* (with Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff).

In addition to the double-episode format, several other changes were made for the show's second season: new executive producers Cliff Ruby and Elana Lesser, of *Mr. T* and *Alvin & The Chipmunks* fame, were bought in and were tasked to "improve" the series; and the show also received a new voice cast, a new title sequence (including a computer-generated zoom through the Endor system, prescient of what would later come from Lucasfilm Animation), a new theme song, and modified character designs.

The show now centered only on Wicket, Kneesaa, Teebo, and Latara, with Chirpa and Shodu (representing “parental figures”), as well as Logray and Malani, in secondary roles.

The main cast now had more defined roles, goals, and personalities: Wicket receives a belt of honor and performs missions to prove himself as a warrior; Teebo is now Logray’s apprentice magician and very clumsy; Kneesaa is training to become the next village chief; and Latara is a girly-girl who likes jewelry, makeup, and clothing. Other secondary characters from the first season, such as Deej, Widdle, Weechee, Asha, Paploo, and Aunt Bozzie, were relegated to background roles. The Duloks made a couple of appearances, and the hanadak – mentioned and seen in flashback in a few episodes – finally appeared (“Gone with the Mimphs”).

The Sunstar became an important item in several episodes, coveted by evil beings such as The Stranger (“Night of the Stranger”), Jaydru the Sorceress (“Baga’s Rival”), the mud-loving Bothel and Trud (“Malani the Warrior”), and Doctor Raynar (“Battle for the Sunstar”). Aside from Mooth the Trader and Gorneesh and his Duloks, none of the occasional non-Ewok allies and villains from season one returned. However, several new characters were introduced, such as the Totem Master and Odra, the Duchess of Sleet, multiplying the already absurd number of sentient species living on Endor’s Moon.

One of the silliest episodes, “The Season Scepter,” introduced the concept of magical beings representing the seasons (which they controlled via the titular scepter), bearing such names as the Leaf Queen, the Ice King, the Flower Queen, and the Sun King. While the first season had invisibility soap, the new shows featured other incredibly powerful items that could make any individual or tribe rulers of the forest, but were used only as plot devices: a wish plant (“The Wish Plant”) creates anything out of thin air, while a luck sprite (“Just My Luck”) can change any odds happening near it, depending on whether a situation is of the good or bad variety.

The season was made even more child-friendly with silly pratfalls and Hanna-Barbera-like sound effects, and animated flowers and talking animals now existed. One highlight was “The First Apprentice,” in which Logray’s former (and now evil) apprentice, Zarrak, tries to corrupt young Teebo. Zarrak had potential as a replacement for Morag as a recurring villain, but sadly did not survive to the end of the episode. Another

highlight, of course, was “The Battle for the Sunstar,” in which an Imperial Star Destroyer appears over Endor and Doctor Raynar plans to betray the Emperor by stealing the Sunstar from the Ewok village. The Ewoks even make friends with a droid named PD-28 and manage to escape from the Star Destroyer in an escape pod. The concept of Ewoks speaking their own language is put in question, when the Imperials perfectly understand what they are saying. But “despite the alterations and a new time slot, ratings remained low, and ABC decided not to renew [*The All-New Ewoks*].”[154]

All throughout the shows’ broadcasts on TV, Marvel Comics’ Star Comics kept on publishing its *Ewoks* series and adding titles to its imprint, such as *Care Bears*, *Thundercats*, and *Masters of the Universe*, with new editors Mike Carlin and Denny O’Neil recruited to handle the expansion. Many more titles were added to Star Comics’ lineup until the imprint was cancelled in 1989. *Ewoks*’ fifth issue went on sale during the show’s initial run on 1 October 1985. Issues #6-12 followed before and during the second season's airing, and the final two were released in early 1987.

The comics, once again by Manak and Kremer, contained original stories and villains, such as two different species of alien invaders, Stagorr the Ice Demon, the top of Mount Sorrow, and the evil underwater tyrant Orcon; allies like Squik and his underwater folk, and the miniature Fleebogs; and creatures such as the elephant-like foonars, a loonee bird, the Kreegon beast, a devil serpent, the seahorse-like wallocks, and a ra-lugg insect beast.

Most stories didn’t seem to follow the continuity of the show, however, including only select characters and animals from it, such as the witch Morag in issues #8 and #12, and King Gorneesh and the Duloks in issues #10 and #13. In the second issue, Princess Kneesaa receives the baby bordok Baga as a gift for the first time, whereas he appears in the cartoon from the beginning. Baga’s appearance, and the fact that Morag is alive, places the comic stories before the TV series’ first episode. One notable exception would be issue #13, in which Wicket wears his belt of honor, an item introduced during the show’s second season, and in which appears Gorneesh’s young son Prince Boogutt, looking a bit older than the king’s young bratlings were in the first-season episode “The Travelling Jindas.” Those elements place the story squarely during the second season, *The All-New Ewoks*.

Another addition to the Star Comics imprint was *Star Wars: Droids*. The first bimonthly issue of *Droids* went on sale in mid-January 1986 (between *Ewoks* #6 and #7), and the two series came out each alternating month until the end. *Droids* was also written by Dave Manak, with art by John Romita (except for issue #5, by George Carragone and Mary Wilshire), and contained only five issues of original stories, followed by a three-part adaptation of the first *Star Wars* movie "According to the Droids," pencilled by Ernie Colón. The five issues followed the show's format of having a new owner for every story, including young Jost Ellon, siblings Vik and Nikki Idd, Ambassador Zell of Majoor and his young troublemaker son Llez, and Kirk Windjammer. Each tale, however, was self-contained.

One event of note is a two-part epic, in which pencilers John Romita and Warren Kremer joined forces in a story that crossed over both titles. "Lost in Time!" in *Droids* #4 and "The Demons of Endor" in *Ewoks* #10 depict the droids going through a space-time warp and being sent 100 years into the future, to arrive near the Forest Moon of Endor, where they crash. The crossover (which, in Expanded Universe continuity, would actually have been more like only 18 years in the future) features the first pre-*Return of the Jedi* encounter between C-3PO and R2-D2 with Wicket the Ewok.

The movie adaptation in *Droids* #6-8 interjects some new scenes, like the droids being fed to the acid lizard Gotar by a race of underground mole creatures shortly after landing on Tatooine, R2-D2 crossing a Tusken camp at night after leaving the moisture farm, a narrow escape from stormtroopers in Mos Eisley, an encounter between the droids and Tarkin and Vader on the Death Star, and the droids chasing the homing droid that leads the Death Star to Yavin IV and escapes into the base.

The first four issues of *Ewoks* were reprinted in issues #1-3 and 5 of the digest-size *Star Comics Magazine* in the United States, and in Marvel UKs *Spidey Comics* #661-666 and *Star Wars Annual featuring Ewoks*, but neither comics series was ever collected in its entirety until June 2012, with Dark Horse Comics' 528-page *Star Wars Omnibus: Droids and Ewoks*. Some stories never saw the light of day after the cancellation of both series. The letter column in *Ewoks* #12 mentions an "upcoming adventure that pits the Ewoks against colonists from outer space," in which Paploo plays a major role. And an issue #15 was solicited in *Amazing Heroes* #118, for

release on 28 May 1987, written by Beat Generation author William Burroughs, with art by underground cartoonist S. Clay Wilson, who had previously illustrated the German editions of the writer's *Cities of the Red Night* and *The Wild Boys* novels. Assuming this item was not a plant by a member of the comics news magazine's editorial staff, "a very special issue" it would have been indeed.

In December 1986, Random House released one last wave of three storybooks (only one of which was an adaptation) under its Happy House imprint: *The Ewok Who Was Afraid*, by Helena Clare Pittman, illustrated by Ron Fritz; *Wicket Goes Fishing*, by Melinda Luke, illustrated by A.O. Williams; and *The White Witch*, by Emily James, illustrated by Bunny Carter. The publisher could have kicked off a whole series of original stories were the TV series not cancelled. Another seven books were planned[155] for 1986 and beyond, but were never released, and included *Ewoks: School Days*, *Ewoks ABC Fun*, and the *Ewoks Learn-to-Read Activity Book*.

Aside from storybooks and comics, marketing spinoffs were sparse in America, spearheaded mostly by Kenner's initial line of *Droids* and *Ewoks* action figures. Kenner released 12 and six figures, respectively, in two waves in the United States (eight *Droids* and four *Ewok*s in Canada), along with three vehicles (the A-wing Fighter, the ATL Interceptor, and the Side Gunner). Eight more *Droids* and six more *Ewoks* figures were announced (in Kenner's *Hot Stuff 1986* catalog) for a second series that was never produced (along with re-releases of the Tatooine Skiff vehicle as the Droid Desert Skiff and the C-3PO Collector's Case). One exception was a Vlix figure that was released in Brazil, along with six other *Droids* figures by Glasslite. Kenner also had planned[156] to release two coloring books (one for each series) in 1986, but only the *Ewoks Coloring Book* went on sale.

As it happens, Marvel/Star Comics' *Ewoks* #14 (which hit newsstands on 31 March 1987) was the last new, not only *Ewoks*, but *Star Wars* story published for a while in North America, as interest in the franchise died out and the "Dark Times[157]" began. It's hard to believe now, but there was a time when *Star Wars* action figures and comic books stopped being produced due to low sales. Aside from going on the *Star Tours* ride (which opened on 9 January 1987) and watching the movie trilogy on home video (*Return of the Jedi* had recently been released on VHS and Betamax on 25

February 1986), it was a pretty bleak time for fans and collectors. For kids, there were a lot of other Saturday-morning cartoons (most on ABC) and toy lines as the mid-'80s saw a huge boom of franchises for boys and/or girls that were far more interesting, such as *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*, *The Transformers*, *My Little Pony*, *The Real Ghostbusters*, *Care Bears*, and *Thundercats*, among others. Those shows had more commercial appeal than *The All-New Ewoks*.

Going Dark

Meanwhile, in Spain, *Ewoks* and *Droids* were enjoying some popularity. *Los Droids* was airing on TV1 Saturdays at 15:35 in 1986. While Editorial Planeta-DeAgostini was reprinting the Star Comics series out of order in *Telecomic Presenta* (in issues #13-28), another Barcelona-based editor, GEPSA, was publishing an anthology series titled *MyComyc*, which featured two-page strips starring popular cartoon characters such as Inspector Gadget, the Pink Panther, Tom and Jerry, and Spain's own Ratoncito Pérez, as well as David, el Gnomo. Interestingly, it also contained original *Droids* and *Ewoks* stories in the 16-issue series' first eight issues (#8 only had *Ewoks*), totalling 15 tales in all.

The dates and frequency of the publication are lost in obscurity, but one online source mentions that the first issue could have been published in April 1986. The *Droids* strips included appearances by Jord Thall and Kea Moll stealing the *Trigon I* from the Fromms, and the droids on Roon capturing Vlix. The *Ewoks* stories, meanwhile, offered appearances by the Quorks, from Marvel's comic book series. The stories are nonsensical and the art is very crude, and the notion that GEPSA was actually authorized to even print the Lucasfilm licenses seems highly unlikely. The first eight issues were later collected in a *MyComyc retapado* (collected) edition, which is basically the magazine glued into a new cardboard cover. Various licensees in Spain also spawned exclusive collectibles, such as PVC figurines, a card game, soundtrack records, sticker albums, and two home computer games[158] produced by Walther Miller in 1987 for the MSX platform.

Additionally, Spain's Plaza Joven Ediciones published translations of six Random House storybooks (three from each show), taking the

opportunity to publish new material as well. Two other storybooks, by unknown authors, were published in 1986, titled simply *Ewoks* (adapting the episode “The Travelling Jindas”) and *Star Wars: Droids* (adapting “The White Witch”)[159]. Plaza Joven also published eight 24-page mini-storybooks (four for each series) which were glued on a bigger cardboard image of characters or ships from the shows. Around the same time, Editorial Roma published a series of four “Panoramicos Ewoks” and four “Dinamicos Droids” pop-up books. All of these offer a mixture of scenes from episodes and original interludes.

In addition, the cartoons were short-lived in France[160] from 1986 to 1987. While both shows, dubbed in French, were released on home video, only *Les Ewoks* aired on TV and became more popular, with translations of three Random House storybooks and the Marvel comics (in *Star TV Junior*), along with original material such as a sticker album, two board games, and a record album of the new French-language theme song “Les Petits Ewoks” by French singer Dorothée. Both series also received home video releases in Germany, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

In 1987 and 1988, both shows received a revival of sorts in the United Kingdom. Marvel UK began publishing *Ewoks Monthly*, a series of out-of-order *Ewoks* reprints in October 1987 that ran for 10 monthly issues, culminating in a 62-page hardcover *Ewoks Annual* on 1 August 1988. The annual contained two reprinted comics, but more interestingly is that it also featured three short prose stories of original material (“Chief Chirpa Kidnapped,” “Return of the Great One,” and “The Ice Princess”), making it a prize for collectors. These tales introduce Halloween and the game *Monopoly* to the *Star Wars* universe.

In addition, there was a *Droids TV Special* that same year, but that hardcover volume contained only comic reprints. In April 1989, Marvel UK also repackaged *Droids* comics in the weekly magazine *The Marvel Bumper Comic* (#15-25), following a *Droids Spring Special*. And in September and December 1987 (respectively), Dragon Books released a series of four storybook adaptations and one colouring book[161] each for *Ewoks* and *Droids*, as well as a mini-activity book titled *The R2/D2 Quiz Book and C/3PO Puzzle Book*.

Another interesting U.K. release in 1988 was a *Star Wars: Droids* PC game by M.A.D. (Mastertronic Added Dimension) in two different

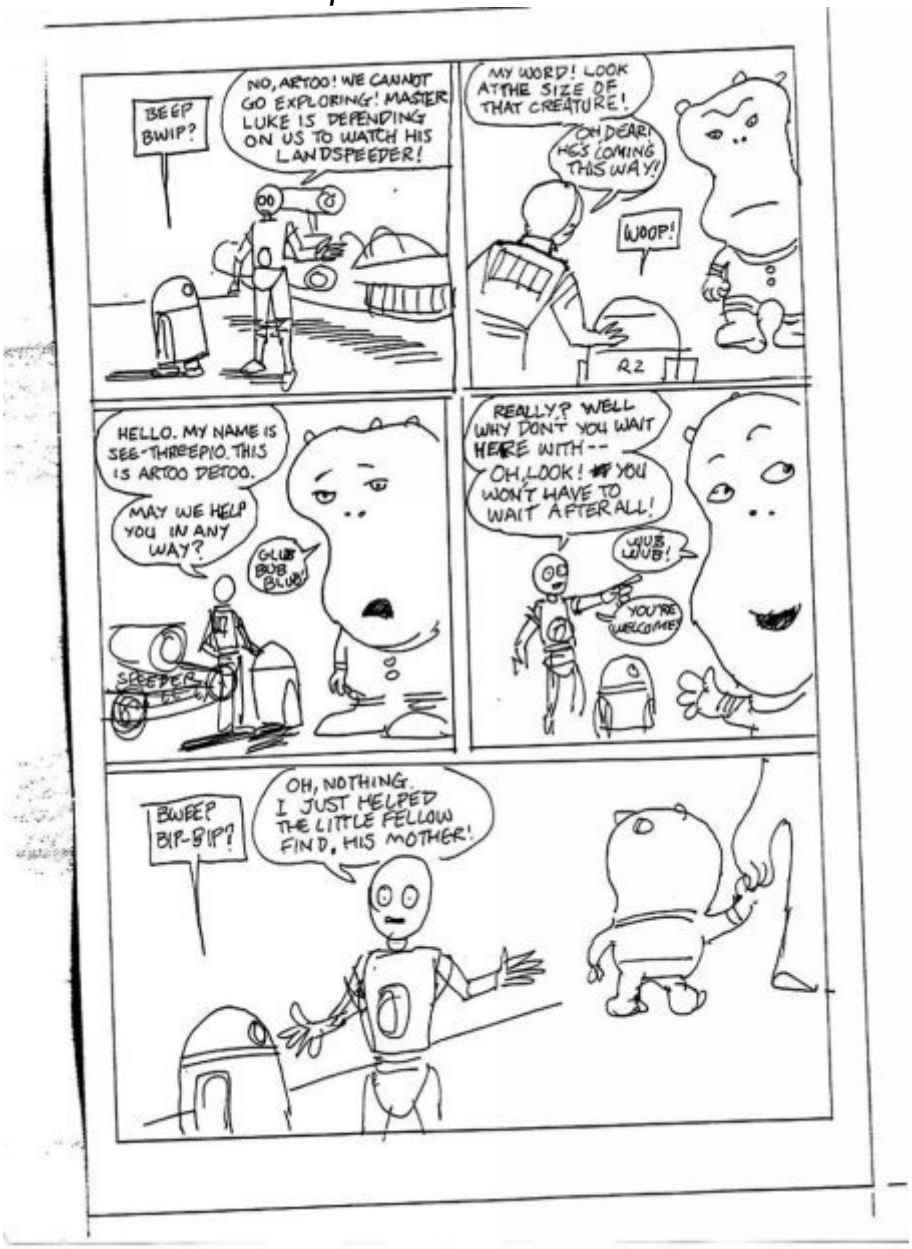
versions: one for the Commodore 64/128 and another for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum 48/128/+2 and Amstrad CPC464/CPC664/CPC6128 systems. This crude game presents an original story titled “Escape from Aaron,” in which the player controls C-3PO as he and R2-D2 try to ascend eight levels of the Fromm gang’s underground prison on Ingo’s moon, in order to escape and meet up with their masters, Jord and Thall.

In late 1988, CBS/Fox Video released most of the episodes on VHS and Betamax. The first wave consisted of *Droids 1: The Battle Against Sise Fromm* and *Droids: The Great Heep*, as well as the first season of *Ewoks* in three volumes: *Morag’s Revenge*, *The Gupins and the Jindas*, and *Wicket the Hero*. Two single-episode tapes (*Ewoks: Night of the Strangers* and *Droids: Tail of Roon Comets*) were also offered as a mail-in promotion from Dairylea, “Britain’s favourite cheese spread.”

A second wave followed later in the year, with *Droids 2: The Pirates and the Prince, Droids 3: Unchartered Space, Ewoks 4: Wicket’s Adventures as He Becomes a Warrior, Ewoks 5: Wickett’s* [*sic*] *Adventures*, and *Ewoks 6: Battle for the Planet Endor*. Since each season contained 13 episodes and each tape had four, one episode from each had to be left out. For *Droids*, that meant losing “Coby and the Starhunters,” while for *Ewoks*, left out were “The Three Lessons” (season one) and “Prow Beaten”/”Baga’s Rival” (season two). With the sparse releases of the series in North America, mostly in edited versions, these U.K. tapes remain the best English-language versions available along with the rarer Australian releases.

In North America, the shows have received spotty home distribution. In 1990, J2 Communications released two single episodes on VHS as part of “The *Star Wars* Trilogy Animated Collection” (*Ewoks: The Tree of Light* and *Droids: The Lost Prince*), followed by four “special double-length editions” which offered three additional select episodes of each series. After both shows were rebroadcast in an edited format on the Sci-Fi Channel in 1996, CBS/Fox released two *Star Wars Animated Classics* movies on VHS on 11 February 1997, which consisted of four episodes each, re-scored and blended together and titled *Ewoks: The Haunted Village* and *Droids: The Pirates and the Prince*. The same movies were re-released on DVD on 23 November 2004, as two double-disc editions, along with a new movie

comprising four more edited episodes, titled *Ewoks: Tales from the Endor Woods* and *Droids: Treasure of the Hidden Planet*.


BEEP BWIP?
NO, ARTOO! WE CANNOT GO EXPLORING! MASTER LUKE IS DEPENDING ON US TO WATCH HIS LANDSPEEDER!
MY WORD! LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THAT CREATURE!
OH DEAR! HE'S COMING THIS WAY!
WOOP!
R2
HELLO. MY NAME IS SEE-THREEPIO. THIS IS ARTOO DETOO.
MAY WE HELP YOU IN ANY WAY?
GLUB BUB BLUB!
REALLY? WELL WHY DON'T YOU WAIT HERE WITH--
OH, LOOK! YOU WON'T HAVE TO WAIT AFTER ALL!
WUB WUB!
YOU'RE WELCOME!
BWEEP BIP-BIP?
OH, NOTHING. I JUST HELPED THE LITTLE FELLOW FIND HIS MOTHER!

An unpublished sketch from Dark Horse's *Droids* strip, by Ryder Windham and Bill Hughes, which appeared on the back of Kellogg's Apple Jack cereal boxes

Legacy

When West End Games published its line of *Star Wars* Roleplaying Game books from 1987 to 1997, the authors expanded on almost all of the films' obscure background characters and droids, and created names for alien species, planets, and vehicle, starship, and weapons manufacturers

from the movie trilogy, as a basis for the game universe, on top of creating an enormous amount of original elements and storylines. The writers even culled material from movie production sketches and the novels by Brian Daley, L. Neil Smith, and Alan Dean Foster (and later from several other Expanded Universe books and comics). Strangely, all material from the *Ewoks* and *Droids* cartoons, as well as the Ewok movies, was left out – which could have been due to an edict from Lucas Licensing, or the lack of readily available copies (and lack of popularity) of the episodes could have played a hand in the decision. This inadvertently created some continuity discrepancies by stating that A-wing and B-wing fighters (both of which had been featured in *Droids*) were invented post-Battle of Yavin, and that the only sentient species on Endor were Ewoks.

Ballantine/Del Rey was publishing a series of non-fiction reference books during the same period. Bill Slavicsek's *A Guide to the Star Wars Universe, Second Edition* (March 1994) includes some entries from both animated series, as do *The Essential Guide to Characters*, by Andy Mangels (November 1995), *The Essential Guide to Planets and Moons* (August 1998), by Dan Wallace, and *The Essential Guide to Droids* (March 1999), also by Wallace. In April 2001, *The Essential Guide to Alien Species*, by Ann Margaret Lewis, revealed the full names of the stars from Ewoks, Wicket Wystri Warrick and Kneesaa a Jari Kintaka, and indicated that they got married during the same ceremony in which the princess was crowned chief after the death of her father, Chirpa.

Two *Star Wars Fairy Tales* books from Warner Books – including *Jaina and the Hanadak*, by John Whitman, which would have featured a visit to Endor and a creature from the cartoon – were solicited in *Advance Comics* #80 (August 1995), but were never released.

Dark Horse Comics, Marvel's successor for the license to publish *Star Wars* comics, had enormous success with its *Dark Empire* miniseries and also started publishing a six-issue series titled *Star Wars: Droids* throughout 1994. Although that series is not influenced by or related to the cartoons, except for starring the same droid duo and having a kindred spirit, it is worthy of inclusion here. The entire series, written and edited by Dan Thorsland and Ryder Windham, with issues drawn by Bill Hughes or Ian Gibson and covers by Kilian Plunkett (now Lucasfilm Animation's lead designer), was collected in June 1995 as *The Kalarba Adventures*, along

with a prelude from *Dark Horse Comics* #17-19 and an eight-page interlude from *Star Wars Galaxy Magazine* #1.

The series had its origins in Lucasfilm needing a children-oriented series starring loveable characters that were not major stars of the movies, set in a time before the films so as not to affect established continuity. It is almost by coincidence that those pre-set guidelines were the same as those in place with the *Ewoks* and *Droids* shows ten years prior. Although there are several notable differences in terms of style, design, and time period, the two series bear some similarities. Dark Horse's *Droids* series consists of separate episodes forming a larger arc, in which they are owned by the same masters (in this case, the Pitareeze family of Kalarba). What's more, the comic features a cameo by IG-88 and a giant wrecking droid named Grozbok, who consumes other droids much like the Great Heep.

The series is extremely well-written and drawn, and was followed by a second series of eight issues in 1995 consisting of two story arcs ("Rebellion," by Windham and Gibson, and "Season of Revolt," by Jan Strnad and Hughes) which continued where *Kalarba* left off. Also produced was the one-shot *Star Wars: The Protocol Offensive*, scripted by Anthony Daniels and Ryder Windham, from a story by Brian Daley (all of the preceding were collected in *Star Wars Omnibus: Droids* in June 2008).[162]

In 1999, *Star Wars* was back on the big screen with the long-awaited *The Phantom Menace*. Surprisingly, the prequel trilogy includes some indirect references to elements from the *Droids* animated series. *Episode I* features a speeder race called the Boonta Eve Classic, recalling the episode "A Race to the Finish," which also involves a Boonta speeder race; a two-headed alien (Fodesinbeed Annodue, or "Fode and Beed" for short) similar to the character of Krox, who appeared in the "Tail of the Roon Comet"; and a background character named Ebenn Q3 Baobab[163], played by Ben Burtt, who wrote the Mungo Baobab stories for *Droids*.

2002's *Attack of the Clones* included even more references, such as a four-armed restauranteur (Dexter Jettster) similar to Doodnik, who owned C-3PO and R2-D2 for five minutes in "The Lost Prince"; a reference by Jango Fett to "the moons of Bogden," one of which was featured in "The Revenge of Kybo Ren"; and a search for a hidden planet in a library, complete with a library droid, very similar to Mungo Baobab searching for the fabled Roon in the Baobab computer archives in "Tail of the Roon

Comet." And *Revenge of the Sith* had some inspirations as well, including General Grievous's wheel bike, which is similar to the 48 Roller Vehicle that appears in "The Lost Prince" (not to mention a very clumsy roller gulper droid in *The Great Heep*), and buzz droids attacking a starship in space, similar to the space gulper droids sent from Biitu to attack the *Argo Moon* in *The Great Heep*.

The upcoming movie *The Force Awakens* seems to continue this tradition, with a character named Kylo Ren, which sounds a lot like the name of a certain Tarnoogian pirate. The animated show *Rebels* features a Joben T-85 speeder bike[164] manufactured by the Zebulon Dak Speeder Corporation, which comprises a Moll K-19 power generator and a Dusat aft-firing EMP emitter. Even if this doesn't make *Droids* part of canon, it's comforting to know that Thall and Jord had successful careers following their adventures on Ingo. Whether certain concepts from *Droids* share a common inspiration with the prequel movies, or whether Lucas and company took ideas directly from the show, the cartoon series leaves a lasting, although indirect, mark on canon.

Ewoks and *Droids* were given the due they deserved in the new incarnation of the roleplaying game by Wizards of the Coast. References to bordoks and hanadaks are included in *Alien Anthology* and *Star Wars Gamer*[165]. Roon receives a detailed entry, along with stats for some characters, vehicles, and animals from the show, in *Geonosis and the Outer Rim Worlds* (2004). But both series received the biggest honor in a pair of articles centered solely on them. Rich Handley and Abel G. Peña wrote "Star Wars: Droids – The Adventures of R2-D2 and C-3PO," a portion of which was published in the *Polyhedron* section of *Dungeon* #111 (June 2004). With colorful illustrations by Jeff Carlisle, the seven-page article fills in a lot of blanks in the show's storylines, places the events in the context of the prequel movies, and gives information (including gaming stats) about the planets, characters, vehicles, starships, and Annoo-dat species from the "Trigon One" story arc. The authors had written similar articles for the other two *Droids* storylines, but Paizo Publishing dropped its *Star Wars* content in *Dungeon* before they could see print.

The second article was "Castaways of Endor," by Daniel Wallace and Amy Pronovost, which was made available on StarWars.com exclusively to members of Hyperspace on 1 December 2008. The article (which is sadly

no longer available) was originally written for *Star Wars Insider* but was rejected, and gaming stats were then added so it could be published as a roleplaying article in *Star Wars Gamer*. When that periodical ceased publication, the authors went looking for another venue, until it was finally picked up for online publication (*sans* RPG material). It contains information about the Jindas, Gupins, Duloks, Phlogs, Grass Trekkers, Makants, Dandelion Warriors, tree goats, and Wisties of Endor. Both articles are highly recommended, as they provide a lot of new information and expand on the material from the animated series.

Over the years following the prequel movies, *Ewoks* and *Droids* were finally integrated into the Expanded Universe (now labelled "Legends"), receiving mentions in Decipher, Inc.'s *Star Wars Customizable Card Game* (a Kazak the Ewok card), action figures from Hasbro's line (the animated Boba Fett and BL-17 two-pack, and Princess Kneesaa), and mentions in reference books like encyclopedias and essential guides, as well as in online databanks. 2013 was an especially big year for *Droids* and *Ewoks*, starting with a pair of online articles posted in June and July on StarWars.com, titled "The Droids Re-Animated."[166] Written again by Peña and Handley, the articles (repurposing the unpublished portions of the *Polyhedron* article series) collated all elements from the *Droids* series, the Star Comics, the video game, the storybooks, and even the *MyComyc* strips, all in one detailed narrative.

The second important event was the 9 October 2013 publication of Dark Horse's *Star Wars: Ewoks — Shadows of Endor*. This digest-size comic book, written and illustrated by Zack Giallongo, bridges the events from the *Ewoks* animated show, the Ewok telemovies, and *Return of the Jedi*. Set eight months before the Battle of Endor, the story reveals how the Ewoks first encountered the Imperials, who enslaved Duloks to assist in building a base on Endor. Wicket, Kneesaa, Teebo, and Latara go on an old-school adventure, fighting off stormtroopers and defeating the legendary griagh. Although the characters talk and act as in the show, the artistic style depicts them in the realistic style of the movies. There is also an appearance by the witch Charal (from *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor*) and an explanation of what happened to the Ewoks' powerful Shadowstone. The book is truly a great homage to the classic cartoon.

The reason that the animated spinoffs did not catch on with the public was likely the fact that they were targeted at a limited audience. The powers-that-be did not yet know that hardcore fans and collectors had grown up with the original trilogy and were now, for the most part, teenagers and young adults. However, with *Star Wars* fans of all ages now embracing animated series such as *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*, perhaps *Droids* and *Ewoks* were simply too far ahead of their time. Most likely, the two Nelvana series, especially *Droids*, would have been more popular had they aired around the time of the prequel trilogy's release. With unedited episodes readily available online (on torrent sites and YouTube), *Ewoks* and *Droids* are ripe for rediscovery.

Star Tours, or: How to Make a Theme Park Attraction from Existing Resources

by Alex Newborn

It was a dark time for *Star Wars* fans, who had grown accustomed to new theatrical movies every three years (in 1977, 1980, and 1983). With no new films on the horizon – ignoring for a moment those Ewok TV movies – the year 1986 seemed to promise nothing but a dearth of Darth.

Secretly, though, Industrial Light & Magic was once again shooting X-wing fighters, TIE fighters, and a Death Star trench – but not for a feature-length film. This project would prove to be both less than a film, and much more.

In Tomorrowland, fittingly enough, the first hints became known of what lay in the future.

Frequent guests to Disneyland in Anaheim, California, knew that a ride called *Adventure Thru Inner Space* (*ATIS*) had shuttered its doors in 1985, but the *PeopleMover* tram still traveled through the building's upper story, en route to *Space Mountain*. One day, signs appeared in the tunnel proclaiming "Watch for an announcement soon about the *ultimate thrill experience.*"

New *PeopleMover* audio arrived in 1986. The pre-recorded hostess first broke the news: "Across the way is *Star Tours*, a thrilling new adventure inspired by the George Lucas *Star Wars* films." Then the familiar voice of Anthony Daniels, interspersed with Ben Burtt's Oscar-winning astromech sound effects, further explained, "Hello, I am C-3PO, and this is my counterpart, R2-D2. It seems that we will soon be working in the spaceport

up ahead. Artoo says that flights are scheduled to begin this winter. I do hope you'll join us. It seems wherever we go, adventure is sure to follow."

Just squeaking in on the "every three years" pattern, *Star Tours* was fully functional by December 1986, when some lucky Disneyland parkgoers were treated to a soft opening. The full grand-opening festivities took place in early January 1987.

C-3PO had promised adventure, and narration from the Interplanetary Launch Premiere Party,[167] held on 8 January, ended with this advertising tagline: "Two giant Empires, renowned for their excellence in fantasy entertainment, have joined forces and established a home base for intergalactic pleasure travel. Soon, all will be able to know that now the adventure is real."

No longer was *Star Wars* just something to be watched on a movie screen; now audiences could be immersed in that technology. Packaging an all-point-of-view special-effects film by ILM inside a groundbreaking simulator thrill ride, populated by droids programmed by Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI), *Star Tours* could transport fans right into a galaxy far, far away.

All told, four *Star Tours* rides were installed at the various Disney parks in Anaheim, Tokyo, Orlando, and Paris. Although subtly different in their façades and other minor details, they all shared three common elements: C-3PO and R2-D2 repairing a StarSpeeder ride vehicle, a pair of talkative goosedroids in a droid maintenance room, and a botched flight to Endor captained by a rookie pilot-droid.

Although the early coverage – including a January 1987 *Wall Street Journal* article by Steve Sansweet[168] – touted the show's ability to be reprogrammed for other journeys, more than two decades passed before the rides were updated with new destinations and the addition of 3-D, plus a new pilot for the adventure. (As of this writing, Paris is the only location still running the original *Star Tours* attraction, although its changeover has been announced to occur by 2017, for that park's 25th anniversary.)

Exploring the decisions that led to the designs of the first *Star Tours* offers a fascinating look at both sizable expenditures and cost-cutting creativity. Although current audiences think of Disney as having the clout

and the deep pockets to buy whatever they want, such was not always the case.

This mid-'80s partnership predated Disney's outright purchase of Lucasfilm by a quarter of a century. At the time, Disney was not the powerhouse it is today, able to purchase Marvel Entertainment and Lucasfilm at $4 billion a pop. The company was experiencing its own dark time, just scant years ahead of what's been termed the Disney Renaissance in traditional animation in the late 1980s and early '90s.

In an interview I conducted with Tony Baxter, *Star Tours*' director, for *Star Wars Insider* magazine,[169] he credited his then-boss at WDI, Marty Sklar, with "the idea of bringing the outside world of *Star Wars* inside the Disney Parks" in spring 1984. Disney Attractions chairman Dick Nunis defended this outsourcing by pointing out that Walt Disney himself had often brought in experts for attractions, citing Dr. Wernher von Braun's involvement in Disneyland's 1955 Rocket to the Moon ride.[170]

Michael Eisner, who became Disney's CEO later in 1984, called the move (when interviewed for the Disney-produced 2007 DVD *Disneyland: Secrets, Stories & Magic*) a "creative stop-gap before the Walt Disney Co. reinvented itself." The company wanted to recapture a sense of relevance in the pop culture of the time, and *Star Wars* had the proven worldwide appeal.

"We hadn't made new animated movies for a while that were the kind of blockbusters that we finally got with *Beauty & the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Little Mermaid*, and so forth," Eisner explained, adding that "George was kind of the next generation of a Walt Disney." Lucas demurred, however, saying, "I'm not really the new Walt Disney at all... But the truth is that what Walt did for animation, I've done for special effects."[171]

An opening-day sound bite of Lucas's praise for Disneyland foreshadowed his decision to sell Lucasfilm to Disney 25 years later. "I've always felt that there's really only one first-class amusement park operation, and this is it. This is the Rolls-Royce of this genre."[172]

The droids and their new master: Mickey Mouse poses with C-3PO and R2-D2 for the opening of *Star Tours* in this eerily prescient photo from 1987.

Lucas was amply familiar, having observed the park's evolution during annual childhood trips with his family, beginning at age eleven in 1955, the year that Disneyland first opened.

He even shaved off his trademark beard while collaborating with the Imagineers, a nod to an older rule that male Disneyland employees must be clean-shaven. Numerous hirsute ILM staffers likewise followed suit, only to discover that Lucas had grown his back a week later.[173]

Lucas's interests gravitated to one area in particular. "I wanted to have an involvement in Tomorrowland," he was quoted as saying in a *Star Tours*

In-Flight Magazine handout distributed on opening day. “I thought that was a portion of the Park that had always been a little less than what it could have been. And the prospect of introducing the *Star Wars* characters at Disneyland just fascinated me.”

That same day, Eisner said: “When you add new technology as one element and creativity as another, I think you get one plus one equaling four, frankly.”

That new technology was found in the 1970s by Disney’s concept-development vice-president, Charles “Randy” Bright, who learned, while developing plans for EPCOT Center, that London-based Rediffusion Simulation Ltd. had coupled a 13-ton jumbo-jet simulator with sped-up film footage to give passengers a convincing experience of flying at super-speeds. Although the simulators had been previously sold only for airline and military applications, Rediffusion opened up sales to the public; each unit cost a half-million dollars. WDI had toyed with ride concepts for years – surfing, submarine, race car – but had yet to find the perfect match.

Touring Imagineering in 1984, Lucas spied a storyboard for one such concept. In an interview with the *Endor Express* website, WDI’s Tom Fitzgerald said: “We discussed whether that technology might be a good fit for a *Star Wars* adventure. A small team of Imagineers got together to work up ideas for George’s review. I was on that team and ultimately became the show’s writer/producer.”[174]

Fitzgerald, too, saw similarities between their founder and their current partner. As he told *Endor Express*:

> Like Walt Disney, George was the consummate storyteller. He literally acted out the show for us one day. That performance became the basis of the story and script. George was also responsible for the tone of the story. He wanted a mix of comedy and thrill, which he felt hadn’t been done in a ride to date and thought would be unique for our guests.

Lucas was also directly responsible for Fitzgerald’s cameo in the show, as the voice of goosedroid G2-9T. Lucas got a kick out of Fitzgerald’s temporary dialogue for the droid, which had been slated to be translated into Ben Burtt-style “Droidspeak,” and suggested that the lines be kept in English.

The physical design of the original ride in Anaheim was an exercise in creatively overcoming obstacles. Even when later versions at other parks had the luxury of additional space, the design had proven so successful that the core of the experience was kept the same. Remnants of these decisions

can still be seen today in the revamped *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue* (*ST:TAC*).

On the plus side, the newly available simulator offered a groundbreaking way to marry *Star Wars* movie visuals with thrill-ride sensations. Compared to a rail ride like *Space Mountain*, it was less expensive to construct, since it would occupy a smaller footprint, yet it could still give the sensation of traveling great distances.

But unlike the OmniMover system used in such constant-loader rides as *Haunted Mansion* (or the ride being replaced, *Adventure Thru Inner Space*), the simulator would have to cycle through periods of offloading, loading, and flight, seriously impacting the ride's flow-through of park guests. Rather than designing a cabin with only a single ingress/egress hatch, like the *Millennium Falcon*, they created a vehicle with multiple doors on both sides so guests could exit the starboard side while new passengers simultaneously entered from port.

When programming the simulator, the team learned that if a series of movements was too energetic, built-in restrictions would limit subsequent moves. Tony Baxter told *Star Wars Insider* magazine, "Our solution was to get the StarSpeeder caught in a 'tractor beam,' and the resulting paralysis would allow time to refresh the hydraulics. This scene turned out to be one of the best moments in the show."[175]

The teams discussed a 20-minute flight, but even with four simulators at 40 guests apiece, that would limit the ride to only 480 guests per hour. They then cut the flight time down to three and a half minutes, yielding more than five times as many flights per hour, but felt that was too short a payoff after the expected lengthy wait time. Finally, they settled on a flight just shy of five minutes in duration. Even then, the ride could only handle a third as many guests per hour as other popular Disneyland attractions.[176]

C-3PO and R2-D2 entertained visitors to *Star Tours* as they made their way through the long lines.

Foreseeing the potential logjam, the group designed the queue to handle the biggest volume closest to the entrance. C-3PO and R2-D2 entertained guests just inside the door with a nearly 10-minute loop, twice the length of the ride. The two goosebots in the next room each said another five-minute spiel, with each new sight coaxing the guests forward to keep the line moving. With additional pre-boarding videos to watch, by the time guests left *Star Tours*, they had experienced a full half-hour of entertainment, their queue duration five times the length of a StarSpeeder voyage.

Several possible *Star Wars* simulator concepts were kicked around. A submarine voyage beneath the swamps of Dagobah was rejected, as was a race through the Endor forest, and even a time-traveling adventure bouncing all over the *Star Wars* universe. In the 1980s, they settled on a “tour bus in space” storyline, but the unused ideas would eventually resurface for *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue*.

Set after the events of *Return of the Jedi*, the original *Star Tours* was conceived as "Episode 6.5" in the overall timeline.[177] The existing show building was revamped to segue guests smoothly from terra firma into space, by overlaying gritty *Star Wars* style to the mundanity of an airport queue. As Fitzgerald succinctly summarized it, “*Star Wars* + a visit to LAX = *Star Tours*.”

R2-D2 and C-3PO set the “spaceport” tone by repairing Transport 22, a façade of the show’s *StarSpeeder 3000* ride vehicle, positioned exactly where *ATIS*’s full-size Mighty Microscope once stood. Even the serpentine hand rails of the S-shaped queue path were left the same.[178]

ILM set to work creating the ride film using the same techniques they’d perfected for the original trilogy: intricate miniature sets and hand-built physical models, shot against blue-screen onto real film and assembled on a photochemical optical printer. Eight-time Oscar winner Dennis Muren told the *Insider* that the sequence would have been “infinitely easier, by a couple of magnitudes” if computer graphics had been available.[179]

One complication was the lack of cutaways. In the *Star Wars* movies, the special effects shots were often on-camera only for seconds, or sometimes for mere frames, before the editorial style cut to action elsewhere. But when making the “longest special effects shot in history,” Fitzgerald said, every shot had to edit seamlessly into the next. In order to make one continuous dashboard cam-style point-of-view, the pre-digital methods led to surprising adjustments.

During the blue-screen era, the models and the lights stayed in one place while the camera did the moving. Longer shots necessitated more track for the camera, so despite having an archive full of existing spaceships, ILM’s model shop team found themselves building new X-wings and TIEs at a smaller scale. The smaller the model, the less track was required. (This explains why the X-wings in *Star Tours* jumped to lightspeed with their S-foils still in attack position; the smaller models were not built with moving wings.)

ILM also handled cabin monitor video elements like rear-facing shots of an exploding Death Star, R2-D2 in his droid socket on the upper hull, and a “Code 1 Communication” from an X-wing flight leader (a featured appearance by modelmaker Steve Gawley wearing the screen-used Porkins helmet[180]).

Additionally, ILM made the series of planetary destination travelogues shown in the front queue. The faux promos were cobbled together from existing movie footage of Tatooine, Hoth, and Endor’s moon, plus a handful of new model StarSpeeder shots. Although a “mysterious swamps of Dagobah” travelogue survived into presskit materials and 1987 magazine articles, it was apparently replaced by running the Endor one twice.

WDI handled the physical environments, including all of the robotic characters. Sometimes, their duties overlapped; Imagineer Chris Tietz fabricated a scale replica of the iconic Mighty Microscope from *ATIS*, which was sent to ILM to be included in the miniature hangar as a quasi-"Hidden Mickey"[181] nod to the ride that was being replaced. Leaving part of the old in the new is a long-standing Imagineering recycling tradition.

Both organizations also found themselves building full-sized X-wings. For Gawley's shots as Red Leader, ILM was sent a trilogy-used T-65 cockpit from England, only to deem it unusable and build a replacement from scratch. WDI used ILM blueprints to go even bigger, constructing an entire T-65 for the Star Traders gift shop attached at the exit.

The StarSpeeder cabin simulators, each complete with its own movie projector and robotic pilot, weighed in at 10 tons apiece. The team calculated that four could be squeezed into the space once occupied by *ATIS*'s "Atomobile" OmniMovers.

But each simulator's maximum range of motions – its "excursion envelope" – necessitated lowering the floors and raising the roof, causing the project to go over-budget despite its $30 million estimate.

The silver lining was that the roof removal dovetailed nicely with an installation problem, as a gigantic crane was used to lift the vehicles over the Disneyland Railroad tracks and into their new home, an operation that required freeways to be temporarily closed off.[182]

The multiple StarSpeeders each required an identical pilot droid, the rookie RX-24 (Rex), voiced by actor Paul Reubens of Pee-wee Herman fame. Originally conceived as a thrill-crazed robot veteran of the Clone Wars named "Crazy Harry," who was undependable, unpredictable, and prone to all sorts of dangerous stunts, the character evolved instead to a nervous newbie in order to make him more sympathetic to the audience. As Fitzgerald stated, "Everyone can relate to first-time drivers."

Rookie pilot droid RX-24 – better known as Rex and voiced by Paul Reubens – was the only newly designed robotic character for the original *Star Tours*.

The idea for a pilot droid in the cabin came from George Lucas himself, who oversaw the design sculpted by Imagineer Chris Runco. Four Rex models were machined from aluminum to keep their weight to a minimum. But he was the only robotic character newly designed for the show; the rest had already existed in some form.

This inaugural Disneyland version needed only one R2-D2 and one C-3PO, so the simplest solution was to take actual screen-used costumes and retrofit them with internal mechanisms for their Audio-Animatronic debut. Gold paint was acid-etched off of C-3PO's parts, and he was replated in actual gold.

While that may sound a trifle exorbitant, Anthony Daniels explained, on his website, that the internal mechanisms were costlier than the exterior shell: "Disney did spend huge sums, but mainly on creating the amazing animatronics that made Threepio so lifelike. ... I was thrilled to be a part of it. Especially since the animatronics had to wear the suit!"[183]

Imagineer Dave Feiten did the programming for the Audio-Animatronic figures. C-3PO's 10-minute program loop more than doubled the record previously held by the Audio-Animatronic Abraham Lincoln at Disneyland.

While the golden droid's movements may seem delicate and graceful, the robotic figure possessed 500 pounds of oil pressure powering his movements.

“When programming C-3PO, it was very difficult to move his arms without smashing them into the console and buttons,” Feiten told me in an interview conducted for this essay. “I had to get as close to the buttons as possible without hitting them or smashing his arm. I broke a few buttons off in my first attempt to animate him. If you look close, you can see scratches on his hand and the console where I did hit by mistake.” Feiten further revealed that C-3PO has a safe position programmed in at the very beginning and end of his show, “so that when [he] is shut down at night and his oil is turned off, he clears the console from hitting his hand.”

R2-D2 also received the royal treatment, according to Feiten, who stated that the droid’s hollow movie costume was equipped with “a unique electric motor control function for his head turn that makes it move very quickly.”

Other movie costumes were likewise recycled. A stormtrooper was placed in the PeopleMover tunnel, though he disappeared when the tram ride went defunct. In addition, molds were made of a screen-used Mon Calamari mask from *Return of the Jedi* to produce two hangar overseers looking down on C-3PO and R2-D2.[184]

The Mon Calamari costume itself appeared in the Imagineering-produced pre-boarding safety video, threatening to “backfin” a little boy who breaks the ride's no-flash-photography rule. These and other aliens, like Chewbacca, Ree-Yees, and Ewok TV-movie characters Kaink and Teek, were part of a cache of models, costumes, and blueprints loaned to Imagineering from the Lucasfilm Archives.[185] These characters and many more also appeared in opening-day skits for the rides.

Feiten told me that he was the puppeteer for Teek in this shoot. “I hurt my back trying to hide in the row of chairs behind him in order to make him move and be out of the shot for the camera,” he recalled. “That was the most fun I ever had working for Disney.” This includes the time when a painter was so caught up in watching the programming of C-3PO that he accidentally painted Feiten’s legs under the table.

The woman who sat next to Teek and demonstrated how to buckle up was Janny Mulholland, WDI’s project scheduler, who (due to differing

seatbelt designs) had to re-create her intergalactic coif and be re-filmed for each subsequent version.

The central characters of Sector 2 Droidnostics – loquacious fifth-degree labor droid G2-9T and foreman G2-4T – weren't called goosedroids on a mere whim. According to Fitzgerald, in his Endor Express interview, this was brazen acknowledgment of WDI's most daring escapade in repurposing existing resources. Fitzgerald credited Chris Tietz with the idea of plundering another Disneyland show for two slightly redundant Audio-Animatronic characters whose internal skeletons could be put on display as believable robots.

"We stole them from *America Sings*," he admitted. The first two scenes in that attraction had geese barbershop quartets; one day, they turned into trios. (The rest of the geese eventually migrated over to *Splash Mountain*, thankfully with their feathers intact, in another example of WDI recycling.) G2-9T sings a snippet of "I've been working on the same droid all the livelong day," rewording a number from the *America Sings* geese repertoire. This would become a tradition for this character.

Tietz populated the shadowy recesses of Droidnostics with other kitbashed robotic creations. He put a Starriors toy playset on a German model railroad engine, capped with a head made from the Popoids toy line. This assemblage would scurry around on Lehmann Gross Bahn scale tracks, and so was dubbed LGB, according to former Imagineer Mark A. Eades. [186] Although no longer running on rails, it is still on display today at the updated ride in Anaheim, and can be seen as an image on the new version's luggage scanner.

Sector 2 Security droid DL-X2 was recycled from a police robot designated TK4600, a prop that Imagineering built for the third season of TV show *Hill Street Blues*. Little more than a tower with a single arm, this throwaway droid detail led, years later, to one of the least-articulated action figures of all time, when DL-X2 became available for sale as a piece of park-exclusive merchandise.

On Friday, 9 January 1987, Disneyland opened its doors around the clock for a 60-hour *Star Tours* party. Skits were performed featuring an odd mix of costumes. A faux Han Solo sported a very 1980s haircut and an off-the-shelf Lazer Tag pistol. The cantina band musicians wore Don Post Halloween masks, but there were also numerous screen-used Lucasfilm

costumes recycled: Darth Vader, six stormtroopers, two Royal Guards, Chewbacca, seven Ewoks (including Kaink), two Mon Cals, a half-dozen X-wing pilots, Squid Head, Klaatu, Ree-Yees, Weequay, and a pair of Nikto – plus, of course, C-3PO and R2-D2, who unfortunately forgot to bring the scissors. Luckily, Mickey and Minnie came prepared, so Michael Eisner and George Lucas cut the ribbon with a lightsaber that trailed an electrical cable leading backstage.

The second *Star Tours* opened in Japan two years later. At Tokyo Disneyland (TDL), the show was not shoehorned into an existing building, so it was able to stretch its legs a bit. Inside, Imagineers expanded from four simulators to six for increased throughput, while outside the façade was designed to look like giant hangar doors, with a landing pad painted on the sidewalk and grooves in the cement suggesting that the doors might occasionally open to let StarSpeeders launch.

Rain is so common at TDL that the team covered Main Street with a dome. For *Star Tours*, they extended the indoor queue by enclosing a large pre-pre-show space, populated with new droids repairing an additional StarSpeeder on a gantry high overhead.

Additionally, the C-3PO spiel was expanded to twice the length of Anaheim's, though the extended Japanese dialogue was performed by a native speaker instead of Daniels.

Sector 2 received additional droids, including the bird-droids later sold as action figure SK-Z38, as well as an R4-style astromech named R2-D7 who communicated via screen with Admiral Ackbar himself. The Mon Calamari was actually a puppet sculpted and manipulated by freelancer Lynette Ecklund to pre-recorded voice tracks.

Ecklund often used found objects to create her own alien puppets, such as shower curtain hooks for earrings, old vacuum cleaner hoses recycled for a nose, or L'Eggs pantyhose containers for eyes. Her friend Randy Simper, a former NASA engineer, helped her create Ackbar's eye-blink mechanism around a bicycle brake, which Ecklund quipped, in an interview with Endor Express, "It wasn't exactly rocket science for him."[187]

Molds were made of the movie droids rather than depleting the finite number of screen-used costumes. This allowed a new "Astrocultural Inspection" post-show scene with another R2-D2, once again programmed by Dave Feiten.

Nearby was the post-show's "TourScan." This was narrated by on-screen robotic pitchman Dan Android, with the three alternate endings from the 1983 EPCOT ride *Horizons* – Mesa Verde desert farming, underwater city Sea Castle, and space station Brava Centauri – repurposed respectively into additional vacation packages for the desert planet Bar-Neth, the water planet Praya, and a hotel on the edge of the galaxy called the Closest Thing to Heaven.

Some Tokyo elements reappeared in Orlando five months later. It, too, had six simulators, plus bird-droids in Sector 2. And in another cost-cutting move, it hosted screen-used astromechs on indefinite loan from Lucasfilm. Otherwise, it mimicked Anaheim: no additional pre- or post-scenes, and an exit through a gift shop. Its most unique element was the outdoor façade, with an Ewok village providing shade and a natural umbrella, and an AT-AT that periodically blasted water from its chin-cannons. For several years, a life-sized, screen-used snowspeeder and sand skiff were parked out front, but these were eventually relocated to the park's backlot tour.

Three years later, the Paris version opened. It, too, had six simulators, and Anthony Daniels returned to dub himself into French. "I can speak French and fake the odd word in Italian and Spanish," the actor posted on his website.[188] G2-9T also speaks French, but G2-4T reused his original English tracks, giving added meaning to his line, "maybe they're not programmed to my frequency." Another life-sized X-wing was built for the exterior, and outdoor queue lines were shaded by replicas of Jabba's desert barge's orange sails.

A recurring topic in early *Star Tours* press was reprogrammability. Unlike hardware rides with physical rails, software rides could be updated to reinvigorate flagging attendance, as WDI had done with *Country Bear Jamboree*.

Steve Gawley revealed that one approach discussed was to make each *Star Tours* ride film unique. For example, guests could ride the *Star Wars* version in Anaheim, then go to Florida for a version based on *The Empire Strikes Back*, and to Paris for the *Return of the Jedi* version.

"That was the potential, but it never happened," he told me during our *Star Wars Insider* interview.[189] Every park had the same flight to Endor, and so rookie Rex made decades' worth of his very first flight.

The year before *The Phantom Menace* premiered, Imagineers were shown the podrace sequence, and immediately began plans for a sequel to *Star Tours*. George Lucas assured them that the Boonta Eve Classic was an annual occurrence (which makes sense, given that it had first been depicted decades prior, in the *Droids* animated series), and could still exist even in the post-*Jedi* setting of *Star Tours*. The G2 droids could be shown constructing podrace engines in Sector 2. A slightly more seasoned Rex could take guests on his second flight – exiting from the correct corridor this time, with no wrong turn – and podrace engines would eventually become attached to the StarSpeeder, which would win the race. They made plans to upgrade to 3D (something discussed on opening day in 1987), with glasses designed to resemble the goggles of young Anakin's podracing helmet.

Storyboards were drawn in 1998. Many 3D gags did eventually make it into the updated ride in 2011, like Sebulba throwing a hydrospanner at the StarSpeeder's windshield. Other boarded concepts eventually fell by the wayside, however, like having the race still commentated by *Phantom Menace*'s two-headed announcers, Fode and Beed.

In the 1986 ride dialogue, G2-9T had remarked that the Old West reminded him of his former home on Tatooine, commenting that one park guest resembled a former owner of his, except that the visitor had only one head. In a nice bit of parallel thinking, the 2006 *New Essential Guide to Droids* author Dan Wallace had neatly married the 1986 *Star Tours* dialogue with 1999 prequel alien designs, suggesting that G2-9T's former owner on Tatooine – the one he'd indicated had more than one head – might have been a member of Fode and Beed's Troig species.

All indications were that *Star Tours 2* was a go. The team renovated the delightfully named Endor Vendors gift shop in Orlando into a Mos Espa-themed Tatooine Traders, but then... nothing happened. Worried that a single sequence from one movie was too limiting, Disney postponed *Star Tours*' update until after *Episodes II* and *III* hit theaters.

Lucas hinted at other reasons for the delay. Just before *Revenge of the Sith* opened in 2005, fans at Celebration III, in Indianapolis, queued outdoors overnight, in freezing horizontal rain, to attend a panel with *Star Wars*'s creator. During the question-and-answer session, one sleep-deprived fan, perhaps prompted by the Droid Rooms song played in the convention

hall before the program, asked about future plans for the Disney parks. Lucas replied, “They’ve come up with some really amazing ideas, but as you know, Disney’s had a few changes in management and whatnot, which actually may move the whole thing forward a little faster.”[190]

Even after all six films were out and *Star Tours 2* was rolling, there was a new problem. What ONE sequence was the ultimate *Star Wars* moment that fans wanted to ride? Tom Fitzgerald said the solution reminded him of an industry joke. Q: “How many Imagineers does it take to change a lightbulb?” A: “Well, why does it have to be a lightbulb?”

Instead of selecting only one sequence, they devised a slot-machine approach, with a random combination of planets to visit. Even after guests had seen all possible elements, they would still enjoy, on future visits, seeing what combination they got. Two launches, six planets in total, and three hologram messages yielded 54 possible experiences. For an optimal sampling of *Star Wars* locales, they set the new *Star Tours* between the prequels and the original trilogy, internally dubbing it "Episode 3.5," though its official name became *Star Tours: The Adventures Continue*.

Concepts from the 1980s were dusted off and given new life. Pixar director and new WDI honcho John Lasseter felt that the Wookiee home planet Kashyyyk could be substituted for the Endor speeder bike chase concept, a change that challenged ILM to create more of the arboreal planet than had been seen in *Revenge of the Sith*.

Fitzgerald wanted each planet to be visually distinct and, wherever possible, to allow different movements for the simulator. The underwater Dagobah concept was perfect for this, now recycled into a Naboo sequence through Otoh Gunga and the planet core. An ice planet would also fit the bill, allowing a sledding sensation against stark white visuals, but Imagineers worried that *Episode V*’s Hoth was now off-limits in the 3.5 setting. George Lucas urged them to not worry too much about the film continuity in a theme-park setting, saying each medium, whether books or films or rides, was unique unto itself.[191]

Still, they did sneak a tiny retcon into a StarSpeeder diagram visible behind C-3PO during the pre-show. The words “FLUX CAP” appear in Aurebesh font[192], short for *Back to the Future*’s “flux capacitor,” implying the StarSpeeder is traveling through time as well as space. A time-

traveling *Star Wars* adventure was also an idea nixed in the ’80s, now subliminally recycled decades later.

The biggest recycle of all happened when they realized the prequel setting precluded the use of pilot RX-24. Since the ride was now set before Rex’s self-admitted first flight, they needed a different pilot. The Imagineers felt they should go a full 180 in personality, perhaps subliminally clinging to the old “Crazy Harry” concept that had predated Rex. New pilot AC-38, or “Ace” for short, would be a cocky, seasoned pilot in the *Top Gun* vein. Actor Patrick Warburton was brought in to voice Ace, a veteran of *Buzz Lightyear of Star Command* and the *Soarin’* rides.

Lucas, however, felt the character should be something more like Rex: nervous, high-strung, likable, and funny. Fitzgerald had an epiphany the next morning: “Oh my gosh, we have this character already! It’s C-3PO!”

Even with multiple C-3POs now needed – one per simulator – the last-minute change still benefited cost-wise from the character’s existing queue tooling, saving them the expense of sculpting and manufacturing a physical Ace droid. The swap also served to streamline character exposition in the storytelling. Even if a guest had never seen a *Star Wars* film, he or she would have already spent 20 minutes getting to know C-3PO during the now-doubled pre-show.

Lucas loved the new idea, and suggested an additional scene that explained how Ace and C-3PO ended up being switched. Patrick Warburton was not used for this now smaller “red herring” part for Ace, so even he was repurposed, as he was recast in the expanded role of G2-4T instead.

Asked at Celebration V in Orlando, in August 2010, if he was sad about the impending closing of the original *Star Tours*, Anthony Daniels hemmed, “Erm, no. We move on! I am hugely proud of *Star Tours*, but wait ‘til you see the new one!” When Fitzgerald broke the news via the Disney Parks Blog, shortly before Halloween, he quoted Daniels as saying, “Professional grit stopped me from yelling the glorious new storyline from the rooftops.”[193]

After seeing the fans’ outpouring of love for the deposed Rex in the blog’s comment section, Fitzgerald decided to give him a cameo in Sector 2. Rex is depicted newly arrived at *Star Tours*, fresh from his shipping case, but bearing a sticker marked “defective,” a nice retro-continuity to a line

uttered by G2-4T in the old show: “I’m not the one who purchased all those defective RX pilots!”

Since each park was retiring multiple Rexes from the simulators, the crew also repainted extras in a red-and-white color scheme. Not surprisingly, they likewise repurposed their action-figure molds and offered the new deco in the gift shops.

Updates to the pre-show were intentionally minimal, but the paint scheme of the *StarSpeeder 3000* was reversed in order to transform the vehicle into its own predecessor, *StarSpeeder 1000*, making the interiors blue this time and repainting the hull orange.

One of the biggest differences in real-life airports between 1986 and 2011 was increased security. So to repurpose the gooesdroids into their own “younger” versions, they were given different jobs. Warburton as G2-4T would scan the passengers, while Fitzgerald returned as G2-9T to scan the luggage. In a wry social commentary on the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), he mistakes lightsabers for flashlights and lets them pass, then destroys an Earthling’s flash cameras because they are clearly alien weapon technology. Among the *Star Wars*, Disney, and theme park inside jokes inside the bags, kitbashed droid LGB can be seen at one point. (In Anaheim, the robot itself is displayed near the defective RX pilots.)

G2-9T still can’t get the *America Sings* tune out of his head. He now croons a third variation: “I’ve been looking at the same bag, all the livelong day!” He also expands his repertoire with a ditty borrowed from Bill Murray’s classic *Saturday Night Live* sketch: “*Star Tours*... nothing but *Star Tours*!” And he even hums the cantina band song.

Gone were the days when ILM had to build new physical models for *Star Tours*. The bulk of the recycling performed for *ST:TAC* involved ILM’s digital resources: the waitress droid from Dex’s Diner became spokesdroid Aly San San; the window-installing droid from *Attack of the Clones* became a hangar signal droid seen in several places; and the alien species Utai were turned into baggage handlers. In most cases, park-exclusive action figures depicting these characters were then sped along by using existing Hasbro molds from the movie toy line.

Digital starships from the movies reappeared, along with a new digital StarSpeeder. And the Mighty Microscope was digitally rebuilt, visible inside the Death Star, continuing the nod to what had gone before.

ILM's Bill George unearthed workprint footage of the original Princess Leia hologram, recycling the 1976 footage into the new 3D ride. "It's a hologram, so it's supposed to be a little grainy," George told *Entertainment Weekly* in January 2015.[194] Carrie Fisher recorded new dialogue, including "Help me, *Star Tours*. You're my only hope."

John Williams worked with Imagineering for the first time, but decided the original film cues would suffice, so the music was recycled from the movies rather than being rescored. And existing film footage was once again turned into planetary travelogues for Endor, Bespin, and Alderaan.

Sometimes, the archived movie costumes were reused because, per Fitzgerald, "If you want a Wookiee to hit a windshield, you gotta do it for real." Other prequel alien costumes populate the boarding video, including Pau'ans, Pacithhip, and the de rigueur Mon Cal next to a Wookiee for the recycled no-flash-photography joke. Although the character of Teek is nowhere to be seen, Janny Mulholland once more returns to buckle her safety restraint while wearing an outrageous hairdo.

One more cameo goes by in the blink of an eye, when the Empire rapidly searches its database for a Rebel spy reported to be aboard the ride: a publicity photo of George Lucas. Long thought to be the guy ducking under the desk at the end of the original *Star Tours* – in actuality, he was played by ILM modelmaker Ira Keeler – Lucas could at last be seen in the ride.

A certain visual gag might seem impertinent toward George Lucas, but at a D23 Expo panel in 2011, Fitzgerald revealed that the joke was inspired by a statue in Lucas's own office, of Jar Jar Binks in carbonite. The sight gag was added in silhouette to a wallscreen effect in *ST:TAC*. "We didn't come up with the idea," he said, "but we just thought it would be fun to put in there."

Star Tours and its various incarnations consistently got maximum mileage from existing ideas and resources. The classic ride succeeded the photochemical original trilogy, and the current incarnation follows the digital prequels. It will be interesting to see what the future holds for *Star Tours*, now that Disney owns the *Star Wars* franchise and a new film trilogy is being made. Perhaps Episode 9.5 is on the horizon.

Special thanks to Brian Curran, Dave Feiten, Paul Hruby, Christopher Van de Sande, and David Yeh.

A Certain Point of View, Revisited: *The Phantom Menace*, 16 Years Later

by Joseph F. Berenato

26 June 1997.

After more than two years of planning – and 14 years of waiting – filming finally started on another *Star Wars* movie. As promised by George Lucas for ages, this film was to be the first installment of a new trilogy, one taking place three decades before the original motion picture. Fans were finally to be treated to the cinematic rise and fall of Anakin Skywalker, the boy-turned-Jedi who would eventually succumb to the dark side and become Darth Vader.

That particular date holds more significance than that, though. Besides being one day before my 19th birthday (19, of course, being Luke Skywalker's age at the beginning of *A New Hope*), June 26th was the day on which I handed in my first assignments as entertainment editor of my town's newly minted local newspaper, *The Hammonton Gazette*. That day forever stands apart from all others, because it was the first day I was ever paid to write anything.

Over the course of the next two years, both production on *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* and production of *The Hammonton Gazette* proceeded apace. Anticipation built for the release of the motion picture, and readership grew for our once-fledgling local weekly.

The two finally intersected on 26 May 1999.

One week after the theatrical release of *The Phantom Menace*, the *Gazette* released the 21st issue of its third volume, containing my review of

one of the most-anticipated films of the 20th Century.

And I heaped praise upon the film. I gave it four out of four stars, going so far as to start my review – unsarcastically, unironically, and unapologetically – with one single word: "Wow."[195]

Why?

I've asked myself that often since the review came out. At the time, though, I felt more than justified. "Because it's just that amazing," I wrote. "I really can't find one thing wrong with this motion picture. *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* is simply a wonderful movie."[196]

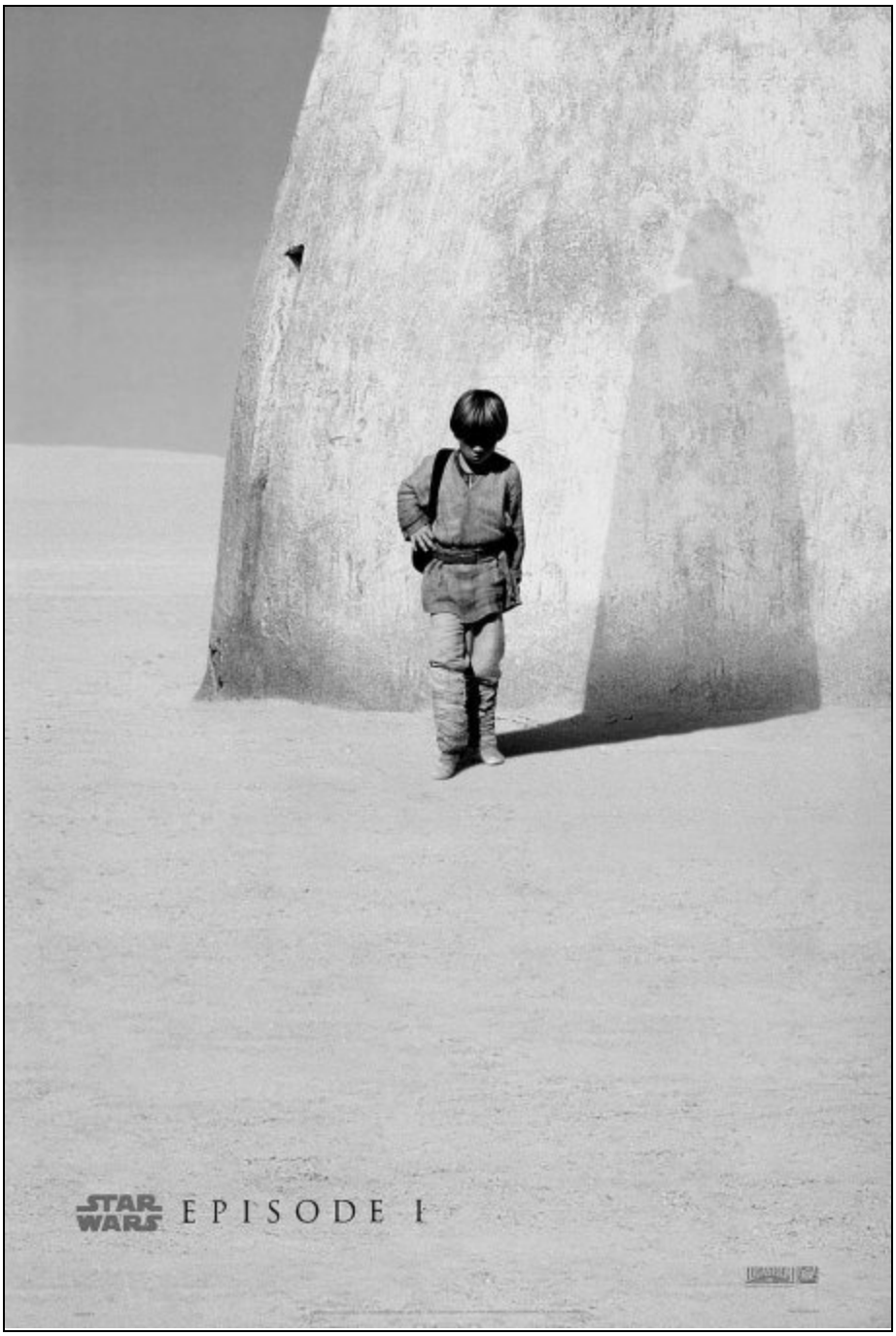
Forgive me. I was young.

Bear in mind that I had, by this point, seen the film three times: once on opening day with a group of friends, once two days later with other friends, and once the next day with a young ladyfriend I met in college who had graduated the year prior.[197] (Three cinematic viewings, incidentally, is my limit. No matter how wonderful a film may be, I won't see it more than three times in the theater. I have no idea why.) I was too young to catch the original trilogy during their first go-round, so *The Phantom Menace* was the first new *Star Wars* film that I had seen at the flicks.

There's a lot to be said for taking in the full cinematic experience: the darkened auditorium, the immersive surround sound, the smell of popcorn… it all adds to and colors one's perceptions of a film and can often unduly enhance said perception.

In the years since I first watched *The Phantom Menace*, my opinion has decidedly weakened regarding its merits. As with all *Star Wars* movies, I still watched it whenever it aired, but I hadn't seen the film in its entirety, start to finish, since May 1999.

Until now.



The teaser poster for *The Phantom Menace* offered the striking image of young Anakin Skywalker casting the long shadow of his future alter-ego, Darth Vader.

The Phantom Menace gets a lot of flak; we all know this. But is it deserved? When I first saw the film 16 years ago, I loved it. I thought it was an absolute triumph of filmmaking, worthy of repeat theatrical viewings. What happened? Was I unfairly swayed by the millions of voices who

suddenly cried out, never to be silenced? Or did I simply take off my rose-tinted glasses, grow up, and realize that the Emperor was naked?[198]

The only way to be sure was to take my own advice from so long ago: "See it soon, then see it again. It's that good."

So I did. I sat down and watched *The Phantom Menace* from start to finish, then watched the deleted scenes. And I did it again. And again.

Does it hold up to my original estimation? More importantly, what did I miss lo those many years ago?

The Story

Eh, we'll come back to this.

The Characters and Their Players

The Phantom Menace was the first cinematic foray into the *Star Wars* universe in 16 years, and, as such, it needed to re-establish the major players in that galaxy far, far away. As a prequel, though, it had a great deal of leeway in terms of how to do that, and how to balance that with the introduction of new characters.

At the time, I stated that "each actor does admirable [sic] in his or her role." Is that still true? Let's find out.

In the first few minutes of the film, we meet two Jedi ambassadors: the as-yet-unknown Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and the much-more familiar Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor), though far younger than we had seen him previously. Neeson, I said, "gets the Jedi reserve (exemplified by Sir Alec Guinness in *Episode IV*) down perfectly, from his very first appearance to the climactic fight scene at the end." At that point, of course, "Jedi reserve" had really *only* been exemplified by Guinness, Yoda, and, to a lesser degree, Mark Hamill in *Return of the Jedi*. Neeson's Qui-Gon Jinn was the world's first look at new Jedi. More were to follow in this film, of course – Ki-Adi-Mundi and Mace Windu among them – but it is Qui-Gon who provides most of *Episode I*'s Jedi characterization.

From the outset, Qui-Gon's very presence is a mystery in more ways than one. He is immediately presented as the master to Obi-Wan's apprentice, despite Obi-Wan's Force ghost telling Luke Skywalker, in *The Empire Strikes Back*, that Yoda was the Jedi Master who instructed him.

(Some scenes in *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith* indicate that Yoda, in fact, trains *all* Jedi "younglings," making Obi-Wan's statement true from a certain point of view.[199] But in May 1999, all audience-goers had was this contradiction.)

Qui-Gon is obviously a major source of influence for Obi-Wan, but the fact that he is never mentioned anywhere in the original trilogy (coupled with the fact that Yoda and Obi-Wan are the only Jedi left by the beginning of *A New Hope*) certainly doesn't bode well for his long-term health and well-being. As well, we know that Obi-Wan trains Anakin, so he must quickly ascend from Padawan to Master in order to take on young Skywalker as his apprentice.

And what of Qui-Gon's apprentice in this film? "Ewan McGregor stands out as a young Obi-Wan Kenobi," I wrote in 1999, "the Padouin [sic] learner of Qui-Gon Jinn. This Obi-Wan is still [a] little rough around the edges and still a little brash, but McGregor emulates enough of Guinness's performance that you can see the Jedi Master that he is destined to become."

That holds true still. McGregor's Obi-Wan Kenobi remains one of the shining lights of *The Phantom Menace*. The actor brilliantly channels Sir Alec Guinness's voice cadence and timbre, a feat that came from immersing himself in Guinness's films, particularly 1952's *The Promoter*. Said McGregor:

> Trying to take his voice, which is very, very distinct, and put it into a young person's body, which is quite weird. I don't know if it worked or not because the voice doesn't age very much. There's not that great a difference in the sound of your voice when you're in your thirties or in your fifties. I'm using a voice that I recognize as an old man's voice and I don't know if that's going to work. I'll find out in a couple of years.[200]

Well, here we are, 16 years later, and it did, in fact, work. This is especially impressive considering that the sum total of advice McGregor received from Guinness himself: "There's not a lot of psychological wracking around to do here. Deliver your lines and hope the background is nicely lit."[201]

When writing about Natalie Portman's role in *The Phantom Menace*, I had to be careful to avoid the character reveal on Naboo. "Natalie Portman also stands out in this movie as Queen Amidala," I wrote. "She does a double role in this film, also portraying the queen's handmaid Padmé, and is completely convincing in both roles." When the review was published, of

course, it was not yet common knowledge that Padmé and the queen were one and the same, and I was not about to be the one to spoil it for moviegoers in my hometown.

Portman's performance was another high point of the film, of course, and subsequent viewings show the subtle nuances she brings to the role of the handmaiden. Consider, for instance, when Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and the queen's contingent land on Tatooine, and the Jedi Master stakes their future on the outcome of the podrace. "Are you sure about this?" Padmé asks. "Trusting our fate to a boy we hardly know? The queen will not approve." When Qui-Gon responds that the queen need not know, Padmé retorts, "Well, *I* don't approve." On first viewing, this is simply an outspoken servant. Only after the reveal, when one goes back to watch it again, does the viewer notice the subtle air of regal indignation in Portman's delivery of these lines.

Portman keeps up this thinly veiled duality throughout the film as Padmé, acting at times as a wide-eyed explorer, curious about the galaxy around her, and at other times as a representative of the queen. Once she reveals her true identity to Boss Nass, those two personalities merge; from then to the end of the film, Padmé Amidala incorporates both of those qualities as well as the commanding presence and royal haughtiness that befits one of her station.

That Natalie Portman was able to breathe such life into the character should come as no surprise. Her break-out role as Mathilde in 1994's *Léon: The Professional*, just three years before filming began on *The Phantom Menace*, was brilliant in its emotional complexity. She brought the same level of acting acumen – which also garnered her an Academy Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role for 2010's *Black Swan* – to Amidala not only in this film, but also in its two sequels.

One character I failed to mention in my original review was Palpatine, played by Ian McDiarmid. Far from how audiences last saw him in *Return of the Jedi*, the man who would be emperor is quite affable at the start of the film, when he is still the senator from Naboo. That likeable character is regularly contrasted throughout *The Phantom Menace* with the mysterious and as-yet-unnamed Sith Lord (whose *nom de guerre*, Darth Sidious, wouldn't be revealed until *Attack of the Clones*), who is mostly seen either in shadow or via holographic projection.

Though moviegoers knew logically that Palpatine and the Sith Lord were one and the same[202], McDiarmid's portrayal of both did nothing to telegraph that fact. Even when the senator began his machinations to manipulate Amidala into calling for a vote of no confidence for the sitting chancellor – which started Palpatine's rise to power – McDiarmid played it in such a fashion that it was reasonable to believe that he truly did have the best interests of the Republic at heart (though most audience members knew better).

McDiarmid also has the privilege of delivering what is arguably the best and most foreboding line of *The Phantom Menace*. At the film's *coda*, he walks past a Jedi-bedecked young Anakin – the boy who will grow up to become the new chancellor's Sith apprentice, Darth Vader – and smiles, saying, "And you, young Skywalker; we shall watch *your* career with great interest." Palpatine refers, of course, to Skywalker's eventual tragic downfall, but is also speaking for the audience, who do, in fact, continue to watch that career (though with varying degrees of interest, particularly as regards the rest of the prequel trilogy).

Jar Jar Binks, voiced by Ahmed Best, is one of the most universally reviled characters in all of cinema.

One of the causes of that varying interest? Jar Jar Binks.

Yes, the Gungan with a heart of gold who comes to the rescue of two wayward Jedi and is pivotal in destroying the droid army on Naboo. In 1999, I wrote that he is "at times annoying, at times difficult to understand." Okay. So that much holds up, right? Nobody can argue with that. And had I stopped there, there would be no need to re-address anything I said.

But no. I had to keep going. I finished my thought by writing, "[…] but the film (despite what you may have heard) would not be complete without

him.”

Again. Forgive me. I was young.

There have been thousands of pages, both actual and virtual, full of vitriol and bile devoted to the near-universal hatred of Jar Jar Binks, so I won’t devote too much space here beating that particular dead tauntaun. Suffice it to say, I agree with most of them.

I, too, was never a fan of the vocalizations provided by actor Ahmed Best, particularly whenever the character said, “how wude.” I couldn’t help but be reminded of the youngest child from *Full House*, for whom “how rude!” became a treacle-laden catchphrase of the 1980s and '90s. As well, I won’t go as far as other sources to say that it was *overly* racist, but every time Jar Jar said “meesa,” I heard “massah,” and whenever he got scared, I fully expected him to scream “Feets don’ fail me now!”

I also won’t harp on the fact that his slapstick antics are wholly uncharacteristic of the *Star Wars* universe – or they were, until this film. Jar Jar stumbles and blunders his way through the film, clumsily bumbling into mayhem everywhere from Watto’s shop to the Naboo battlefield. His most annoying bit? (And I fully understand that this is totally subjective, since one could argue that *all* of his bits vie for most annoying.) When he puts his face into the energy beam on Anakin’s podracer. Jar Jar’s face and tongue go instantly numb, and his speech for the next few minutes sounds exactly like Bill Cosby in the dentist chair from his *Himself* special.

Yes, these were all problems for me. But I was willing to let them go, as I felt that Jar Jar was integral to the storyline. Without him, Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan wouldn’t have met the Gungans, nor would they have had transportation to get to Amidala. The Gungans and Naboo never would have joined forces and destroyed the droid army. (More on the necessity of all this later).

What I don’t like about Jar Jar is that he represents the *Star Wars* universe’s slide into one of the basest forms of humor: flatulence and scatological.

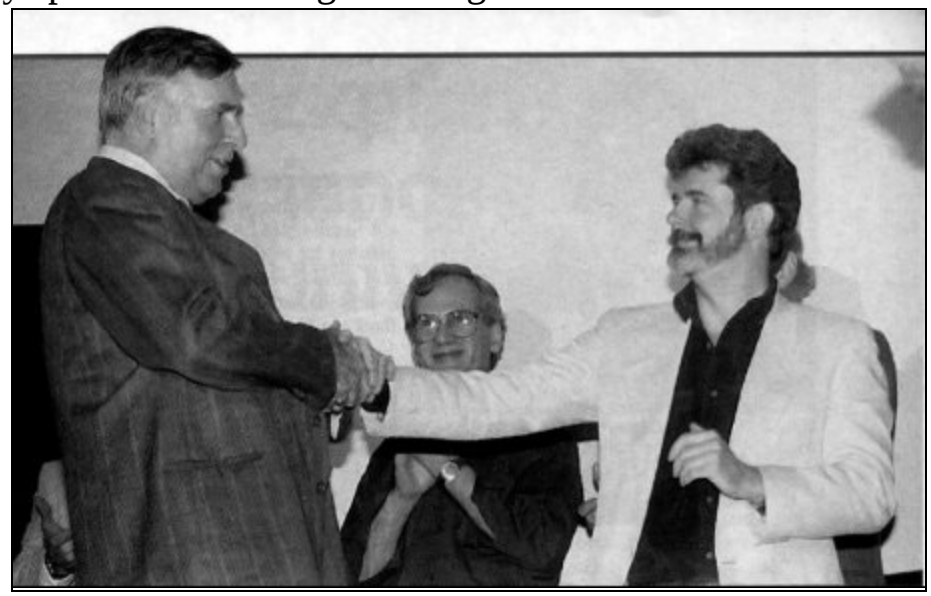
Yes. Thanks to Jar Jar Binks, we have poop and fart gags. In *Star Wars*.

During Jar Jar’s short time on Tatooine, he manages to be the first character in *Star Wars* history to step in a pile of dung; in this case, presumably Bantha excrement. Not long after that, a Tatooine pack animal, the eopie, breaks wind right in his face. This was also a first.[203]

Cue cheap laughs from the kiddies.

So why the devolution in humor? I have a theory.

It's well-documented that George Lucas is a *Star Trek* fan, and it's rumored that he would take breaks from writing *Star Wars* scripts to watch *Trek* reruns. Lucas even met *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry on stage at the *Star Wars* 10th-anniversary convention in 1987, and the two reportedly spent time chatting backstage.



Gene Roddenberry, clearly performing a Jedi mind-meld on George Lucas in 1987

So where am I going with this? In the second season of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, in the 1988 episode "The Outrageous Okona," Lt. Cmdr. Data conjures a 20th-Century comedian in the form of Joe Piscopo to learn about humor (so why he chose Piscopo remains a mystery, but whatever… work with me here). After the holographic comedian hands in a passable Jerry Lewis impression, Data asks that if one were to "jump around like an idiot, that is considered funny?" Additionally, in the 1989 film *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (the first *Trek* movie released after Roddenberry and Lucas met), there is a scene in which the *Enterprise*'s chief engineer, Montgomery Scott, bonks his head on a beam, knocking himself unconscious. In another scene, Captain Kirk and Doctor McCoy muse about the effects of baked beans on Mr. Spock's digestive system.

See now? Clearly, during their talk backstage, Roddenberry attempted to obliterate his competition by poisoning Lucas's mind with wild gesticulative humor, slapstick, and gas jokes, even going so far as to

sacrifice a portion of his own franchise in order to forever sabotage the *Star Wars* universe and give the world the bane that is Jar Jar Binks.

It's the only logical explanation.

Unfortunately, it doesn't explain the final – and perhaps most vital – character in *The Phantom Menace*: Anakin Skywalker.

We knew before we even went into the film that *The Phantom Menace* would introduce us to the boy who would be Darth Vader and, by trilogy's end, he would finally don the familiar helmet and cape. The mystery lie in the course the journey would take. The only things we knew for certain were that Obi-Wan would train him, they would fight side-by-side in the Clone Wars, Anakin would prove to be a hell of a pilot, and at some point he would fall into a volcano.[204]

Most of us weren't expecting a cute little floppy-haired youngster, played by Jake Lloyd. But when the teaser poster was released, showing a forlorn Anakin on Tatooine, with a long, Vader-shaped shadow behind him, the foreboding power of that imagery was enough to make most of us excited to see what turned that harmless scamp into the scourge of the galaxy.

So naturally we wouldn't see any of that in *The Phantom Menace*.

As with Jar Jar, much has been written denigrating both Jake Lloyd and young Anakin, including my own review in 1999. "The only distraction," I wrote, "is Jake Lloyd as young Anakin. He is a little stiff in his role." I was, of course, being kind. Cute though Lloyd may have been, he was ill-suited for the part. His expression hardly varied through the course of the picture, regardless of whether the scene called for him to be scared, determined, sad, happy, wistful, or whatever. True, one could make the case that one shouldn't expect much of an actor that age, but that would be a case with no solid footing. Other actors his age or younger have shown far greater range, his contemporary Haley Joel Osment in *The Sixth Sense*, also released in 1999, among them.

Still. He was a boy who passed his audition fair and square. He did not write his lines, so no matter how much one may wish to do so, Lloyd cannot be blamed for such gems as "Are you an angel?" and "Yippee!" He did not write the script, so he cannot be blamed for any of Anakin's actions, be they intentional or accidental.

And it was those accidental actions that stuck in the craws of a lot of moviegoers. As I wrote, "[…] at points when you are to assume that he succeeds because of his power over the Force, it instead seems that he stumbles into good fortune." In simpler terms, he "oops"ed his way into destroying the droid control ship, and that felt cheap.

It had already been established during the podrace that Anakin was as he said – a master pilot. Yet when it came to pass that he joined the Naboo attack force against the Trade Federation, he found himself in the thick of it through a series of improbable blunders, and managed to wreak the havoc that he did purely because he kept pushing buttons until something worked.

Jake Lloyd has certainly paid the price over the last 16 years, too. He has received an unfair amount of blame for bringing shame to the franchise – not unlike Cousin Oliver of *The Brady Bunch*, or Seven Bundy of *Married with Children*, two other blonde tykes – and quit the world of acting because of it.

I reached out to Jake Lloyd during the writing of this essay, in the hopes that he might be willing to offer some comments about this film and its effects on his life, but he declined to be interviewed. Shortly thereafter, he was in the papers once more; Lloyd was arrested following a high-speed chase that spanned two counties and culminated with his car careening into a tree. And shortly after *that*, his mother revealed that Lloyd has been suffering from schizophrenia since he was 19.[205]

Millions of people may say that George Lucas, *The Phantom Menace*, and the prequel trilogy ruined their childhoods and their lives, but Jake Lloyd is the only person on Earth who can say it and actually *mean* it.

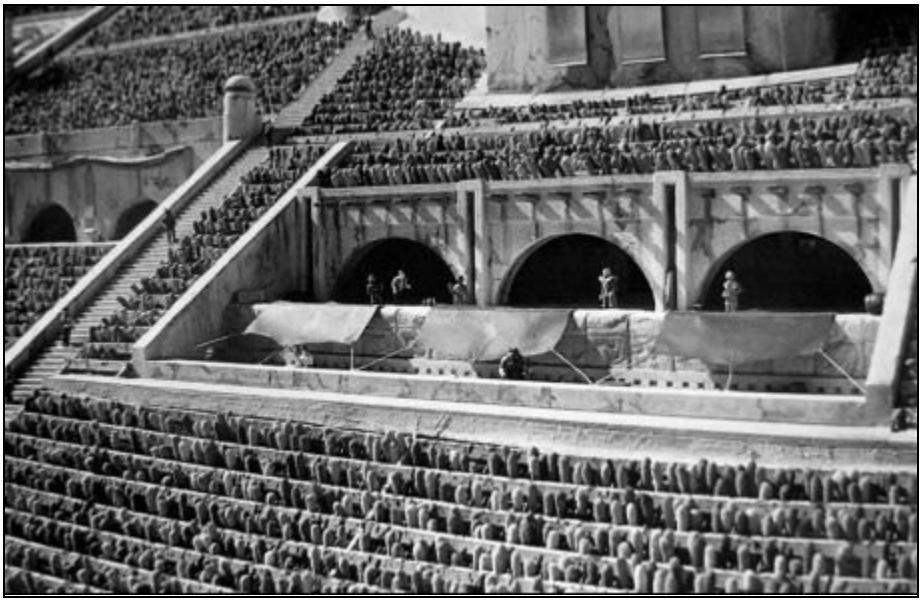
The Story

Nope. Not yet.

The Special Effects

Visually, *The Phantom Menace* was, at the time, a spectacle to behold. It represented the absolute cutting edge of CGI technology, and it was simply glorious. "Naturally, the special effects are unbelievable," I wrote in 1999. "Complete alien landscapes, whole cities, underwater civilizations, palaces, even characters are all digitized, and they all look completely realistic."

I stand by that assessment, though I admit it does need a bit of correction.



Thousands of Q-tips were used as stand-ins for people in the model built for the podraing scene in *The Phantom Menace*.

At the time, many of us were under the impression that nearly everything was computer-generated imagery. And while it's true that every single shot except one contained CGI footage – the dioxis gas being released on the Trade Federation ship has not one ounce of digitization to it[206] – there were a lot more traditional effects techniques used than previously thought. Models of many of the ships were, in fact, built and used for space battle sequences, and many exteriors – including most of the podrace track and much of the Naboo capital of Theed – were also models that were enhanced by matte paintings and CGI.

Does it all hold up? Of course not. Though they were the best that CGI had to offer at the time, they were still digitized in the era of 35mm film and cathode ray tube televisions. Watching them now from a Blu-ray disc on a 1080p LCD flatscreen television, it's a bit easier to pick up on what looks realistic and what doesn't than it was when sitting in a darkened theater.

Does it matter? Not really. It's still beautiful, and one would be hard-pressed to find any dissenting opinions on that.[207]

The Story

Okay. Let's talk about this.

From the start of the film's opening crawl, audience members knew that this probably wasn't going to be the slam-bang action extravaganza that we had hoped it would be:

> Turmoil has engulfed the Galactic Republic. The taxation of trade routes to outlying star systems is in dispute. Hoping to resolve the matter with a blockade of deadly battleships, the greedy Trade Federation has stopped all shipping to the small planet of Naboo. While the congress of the Republic endlessly debates this alarming chain of events, the Supreme Chancellor has secretly dispatched two Jedi Knights, the guardians of peace and justice in the galaxy, to settle the conflict....

Trade disputes. Shipping blockades. Congressional debate. Doesn't exactly scream "excitement," does it?

But that's okay, because this entire film was never meant to be a standalone feature. I even noted that back in 1999:

> This trilogy is best understood as a three-act drama, with *Episode I* as the first act. As with any drama, the first act serves to set the stage for the rest of the drama, with key themes and characters being introduced now; development to follow in acts two and three. *Episode I* fits this perfectly – here, we're introduced (and, in some cases, re-introduced) to the major players in the drama, with more plot twists and turns to follow in the coming years.

With that in mind, it's far easier to swallow the surprisingly slow pace of *The Phantom Menace*, even if I was wrong about the twists and turns in the ensuing years.

Much can be said about the intricacies of the plot, and it's easy to see what Lucas was *trying* to do. Embargoes and trade disputes have been the seemingly innocuous start to many of humanity's wars, so it does logically follow that such matters can foment unrest anywhere in the cosmos.

But that doesn't necessarily make for interesting cinema. As well, political intrigue never really had a place in the *Star Wars* universe. Yes, we knew that Princess Leia was a senator, but we never saw her in any kind of bureaucratic capacity – particularly after Palpatine disbanded what was left of the Senate. And we never saw Palpatine doing anything imperial, really. Would he have been as menacing a character if we saw him dictating policy? And did Lucas really think that audiences wanted to see disaffected senators and ambassadors in a *Star Wars* film?

No. *Star Wars* fans want X-wings, not *The West Wing*.

Perhaps, though, the largest problem with the entire storyline is that, in the end, none of it really matters.

Consider, for instance, Darth Maul. Here is a guy who was supposed to be the big "it" character, one whose ugly mug was the stuff of nightmares and was plastered all over all manner of promotional materials for the film.

He projected an aura of pure badassery, especially from the moment his double lightsaber was revealed before the film's release. Audiences hoped that he would continue to be a threat throughout the prequel trilogy, but it was not meant to be. Obi-Wan cut him in half as easily as he cut Darth Maul's lightsaber in half. Maul's only purposes, it seemed, were to establish on screen the "master and an apprentice" rule of the Sith (later defined as the Rule of Two), to kill Qui-Gon Jinn, and to die.

And what of Qui-Gon? He has absolutely no long-term effects on the rest of the trilogy, save for a brief mention by Yoda at the end of *Revenge of the Sith* that he'd essentially learned how to become a Force ghost. Big deal. True, he was the one who found Anakin. He was the one who believed that Anakin would fulfill the prophecy of bringing balance to the Force (and he totally does, by the way; by the end of the prequels, there are precisely two Sith, two Jedi, and two untrained Force-sensitive babies left alive – balance). And he was the one who insisted the boy receive Jedi training.

But did we really need to see any of that?

Jar Jar Binks – another character without whom millions of people would be much happier. What were his long-term contributions to the *Star Wars* saga? Yes, he united the Gungans and the Naboo. Yes, he helped fend off the droid armies. But so what? The droids would have been defeated with or without him (and with or without the Gungans, for that matter, though the Naboo body count would have been higher). His *only* impact comes in *Attack of the Clones*, when, as a senator, he proposes granting emergency powers to Chancellor Palpatine, beginning the Sith Lord's slow road to empire. But in *The Phantom Menace*, we knew none of that at all.

So, does any of it matter?

That is exactly the question that fans have been debating for well over a decade, and one – blogger Rod Hilton – says "no."

The Machete Order

Hilton proposes watching the *Star Wars* films in neither production nor chronological order. His preferred viewing order: *Episode IV: A New Hope*, *Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*, *Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, and *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*.

Notice something missing there? Yes. Hilton cuts out *The Phantom Menace* completely. But why? As he told NPR's Audie Cornish and Robert Seigel[208]:

> I see the *Star Wars* saga as being Luke's story. He's the character you identify with. He's the character you relate to. And if you watch *Episode IV* first, he's the one you latch on to. He's your main guy. And it's ultimately the story about Luke saving his father from the dark side and, to an extent, saving himself from being tempted by it as well. And *Episode I* just doesn't add anything to that. It's a distraction. It moves you away from what I consider to be the main narrative.

Hilton's view differs, of course, from that of George Lucas, who has said often over the last three decades that he always viewed the saga to be Anakin's story, not Luke's. Many of us who grew up watching Luke, however, may find Hilton's so-called "Machete Order" to be far more in line with our own view of that galaxy far, far away.

But why set up the order like that? Why not just cut out *The Phantom Menace* and watch them in chronological order? Said Hilton:

> You're using the prequels as an extended flashback. They're inside of the main trilogy, the original trilogy. So it's sort of like, if you watch a movie and it's like, in a middle of a bank robbery or something and that's how you're introduced to all the characters, and then it cuts to three years earlier or something. And then you get this extended flashback that brings you up to speed with how the main characters decided to rob a bank, and then you have the final climax of the movie. So it sort of makes the prequels a flashback to the rest of the series.

Interesting premise. There is, of course, a bit of a shock at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back*, when Darth Vader reveals that he is, in fact, Luke's father. One of the final images of that film is Luke adjusting to his new cybernetic hand, and both he and audience members find it difficult to miss the parallel between him and his old man. Jumping back in time to the start of *Attack of the Clones* and following Anakin's slow descent into the pits of the dark side, then, would make for compelling cinematic drama, particularly when Anakin loses *his* hand in a lightsaber duel to another Sith apprentice. This drives home the parallel even further.

Moving right into *Revenge of the Sith* after that helps finish the story of Anakin's demise, and explains how Obi-Wan and Yoda became the last two Jedi in the galaxy – perfectly setting up the very premise behind the title of the third film/sixth episode, *Return of the Jedi*. Additionally, Anakin spends much of *Revenge of the Sith* in dark robes, which were highly unusual for a Jedi, and this imagery helps provide a sense of foreboding when audience members first see Luke – all in black – in Jabba the Hutt's palace.

Suppose, though, you disagree with Hilton? Suppose you think that *The Phantom Menace* does, in fact, matter, but is just a little bloated? That maybe if some cuts were made, it could have been something really special?

You're not alone with that, either.

The Phantom Edit

Not only does Mike J. Nichols agree with you, he actually did something about it.

Nichols is the mastermind behind what is known as *Star Wars: The Phantom Edit*. In a process that took four months, Nichols went through and edited out close to 20 minutes of film, removing what he thought were "as much story redundancy, pointless Anakin actions and dialogue, and Jar Jar Binks, as possible." [209]

Some of the cuts that Nichols made were major, including the entire submarine scene in which Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and Jar Jar travel through Naboo's core and try not to get eaten by underwater leviathans in the process.

Other cuts are not nearly as big, but they add up. Much of Jar Jar's dialogue has been edited or removed, as well as some of what Nichols called "Jar Jar antics." Same goes for the battle droids and their less-than-riveting speech; Nichols worked them over pretty good, too.

Best of all? Anakin's "Yippee!"s and "Oops!"es are gone.

The Phantom Edit also shaved down some of the scenes that may have been too mired in politics, and greatly reduced the scientific explanation of midi-chlorians being a Force symbiote in all living things.

The final runtime for the edited film is 118 minutes, down from the movie's original 136 minutes, and, while Nichols is quoted as saying, "The intent was not to simply remove footage that I didn't like for the sake of making it shorter,"[210] it certainly does feel that way.

The Phantom Edit certainly is clever, and it was the first of its kind on such a scale. Since then, countless re-edits of the *Star Wars* films have appeared, some cramming the entire saga together into the space of 105 minutes.

But they miss the point. Yes, *The Phantom Edit* is sleeker, the action is tighter, and some of the treacle and slapstick are gone in this cut. And by employing the Machete Order, you skip the problem altogether.

But the original edit in the intended viewing order is probably truer to life; sometimes kids say annoying, stupid things, and sometimes we are beset on all sides by doddering idiots. Lucas's *The Phantom Menace* shows how, despite (or perhaps because of) that, anyone – slave or soldier, peasant or king – can go on to forever change the course of history.

So I stand by what I said in 1999. Despite its flaws, it is a wonderful film.

See it soon. Then see it again. It’s that good.

Power, Politics, and the Prequels

by Zaki Hasan

"I have a bad feeling about this."

Chronologically, that line – one of the most famous and repeated turns-of-phrase in *Star Wars* history – is the first dialogue spoken by a main character in the entire saga, issuing from the lips of young Padawan Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) shortly after *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* begins, as he and his master, Qui-Gon Jinn, begin their planned negotiations with the Trade Federation in the space above Naboo. Appropriately enough, that's the *exact* thought that kept going through my mind as I sat down to write this chapter re-examining the prequels. After all, is any other component of a fan-favorite franchise as divisive, and yet as essential?

It's easy to forget now, but in the aftermath of the 2005 release of *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, the notion of any further "episodes" had been repeatedly and quite definitively dismissed by franchise honcho George Lucas (and the notion of him handing it over to anyone else seemed more far-fetched than anything in his films). As such, the cement of conventional wisdom had pretty well hardened around the idea that the saga was a finite thing. It had a distinct beginning, middle, and end, and that was it. And, y'know, maybe that wasn't such a bad thing.

By now, the swell of anticipation leading up to *The Phantom Menace*'s much-anticipated initial release, coupled with the feeling of immediate deflation that followed, has become a kind of generational marker – something of which all *Star Wars* fans of a certain vintage have very specific memories. But in the years following, as the bad taste from the

prequels calcified, many fans tried all manner of ways to somehow reconcile their love of the original trilogy with their active dislike of the prequels. Ignore some of them. Ignore all of them. Ignore their intended order. Ignore their intended edits. Restore the deleted scenes, since several of them are better than those remaining in the final cut. *Anything* to spare them from the crushing, suffocating realization that their beloved *Star Wars* had metamorphosed from a near-perfect trilogy into a many-flawed hexology.

Sometimes, it feels like an entire generation worked through its complicated feelings about these films together, like the largest therapy circle in history. More than anything, the unkindest cut had to be the fact that this unwelcome transformation happened not as a result of too many cooks in the kitchen, but rather the exact opposite. It was because of the man who'd birthed the franchise, who'd fought to retain control over it, who'd waited until the capabilities of computer technology had at long last lined up with the many wonders he saw in his mind. With Lucas stripped of studio interference and any and all budgetary restrictions, when the time finally came for him to deliver his purest vision of *Star Wars* to expectant audiences, it turned out to be something they didn't particularly want.

But now that the franchise's minders at Disney have promised to keep the *Star Wars* spigot in a perpetual "on" position following their acquisition of the brand in 2012, with the saga poised to expand in all manner of new directions in the foreseeable future, suddenly the prequels take on an entirely different role. Political commentator (and noted *Star Wars* fan) Ross Douthat commented in a 2013 column for *The New York Times*:

> Thanks to Lucas, half of the official *Star Wars* story is unsalvageable dreck – but it's canonical dreck, which means it can't simply be shunted into an alternative timeline in the style of [J.J.] Abrams' *Star Trek*, or dropped down the memory hole the way say, Joel Schumacher's *Batman* movies were when Christopher Nolan set about making *Batman Begins*. Instead, the prequels have to be somehow formally accepted as part of the *Star Wars* story and artistically repudiated at the same time.[211]

But while Douthat's reticence toward the prequels is understandable (and hardly an outlier), I do question his conclusion that they must forever cast a pall over the entire franchise, or even that they're "unsalvageable," for that matter. While future entries in the canon can simply avoid referring to them if they choose (it's doubtful, for instance, that Jar Jar Binks or Elan Sleazebaggano will be making appearances in the upcoming movies), the

prequels can nonetheless inform any number of story directions going forward. And while they're rife with narrative and production deficiencies that will forever make them "lesser" entries in the *Star Wars* cinematic library (though it remains to be seen, of course, whether there's still lower to go), maybe it's time to look at these three films more holistically – not for all of their perceived failings, but for the ways in which they added depth and texture to this faraway galaxy in a time long past.

When you think about it, it would have been relatively easy (and, for many, probably preferable) for Lucas to have satiated the throngs of fans who'd impatiently waited for new films since 1983, by simply creating, in essence, a mirror image of the extant trilogy, in the same way that *Return of the Jedi* mirrors aspects of the original 1977 *Star Wars*. But as shown by the releases of the modified *Special Edition* versions in 1997, which added new scenes and effects, and in some instances significantly altered the actual content from the versions that had been available for more than a decade, the creator was hardly averse to continually tinkering with his creation, even when that meant stuff like Han Solo shooting first or Luke Skywalker screaming in terror after defiantly dropping into a chasm rather than join Darth Vader.

And so it's entirely understandable that the prequels are pointedly *not* about a ragged band of underdogs. There's no "Death Star moment" that serves as a catharsis for the audience. Instead, Lucas used this new trilogy to engage in some very pointed examination of humanity's repetitious capacity to lapse into dictatorship, something that's borne out by too many examples throughout history. As he told StarWars.com, "How do you turn over democracy to a tyrant with applause? Not with a coup, but with applause? That is the story of Caesar, Napoleon, and Hitler."[212]

As far as Lucas was concerned, if there was going to be any story that made the events preceding *A New Hope* worth excavating, it had to center on this intriguing question. Now, just to get it out of the way early on, there's no question that there's a whole lot of runway between "intention" and "execution." And while technological advances between the two trilogies had imbued Lucas with the ability to realize whatever passing whim flitted through his brainpan, there's also the uncomfortable reality that he'd become an Empire of one during that span. No one was there to question those whims, nor to assist in making them a bit more palatable for

mainstream audiences – in essense, no one to let the Emperor know when he had no clothes on. As such, we're unfortunately left with three films of varying degrees of mediocrity that are nonetheless bolstered and bracketed by some pretty terrific ideas (that aren't necessarily realized to their full potential).

There are so many variances in aesthetics, exposition, and even intention that it becomes challenging indeed to watch the films in Lucas's intended number order, but one of the most important differences between the two trilogies is in their approach to and handling of power and politics. While the originals had a fairly binary (though by no means simplistic) depiction of good and evil that neatly fit into the Campbellian framework[213], the prequels were tasked with depicting how the father of one of the greatest heroes in the galaxy could have become one of its greatest villains. This story, in turn, played out against a backdrop of politics, palace intrigue, and, to borrow a turn-of-phrase from Frank Herbert, "plots within plots."

A seemingly insignificant trade dispute in a far-off system led to the senator from Naboo, Palpatine (Ian MacDiarmid), being proclaimed emperor and dispatching democracy with thunderous applause.

Now, before the prequels' release, based on the glimmers of information provided by the extant movies, we knew that we had to see noble Jedi Anakin Skywalker "seduced by the dark side of the Force" and eventually become Darth Vader, the galaxy's baddest baddie. That much had been set in stone thanks to explication and expectation. Unfortunately, the selections of Jake Lloyd to play young Anakin in *Episode I* and Hayden Christensen as older young Anakin in Episodes *II* and *III* may have proven the costliest misfire of all. Neither actor is able to imbue the character with the likability

necessary to make the essential tragedy behind his fall hit home. If there is an original sin of the prequels, it's that.

However, while Anakin's transformation from bad good guy to good bad guy is the films' central throughline, an added bit of inspiration that wasn't necessarily laid out in advance was Lucas's decision to intertwine that fall with that of the Republic, leading to the rise of the Galactic Empire. Now, whether or not this bit of linked development was the smartest of choices (personally, I'd argue it wasn't), what it did allow for was a ground-up view of how the Old Republic functioned, and ultimately how it fell apart. It happened not because of an impinging onslaught by an external force, but rather due to internal strife and decay, and the willingness of the populace to cede ever-greater amounts of power to bureaucrats and politicians.

If there is a genius aspect to the prequels, then, it's in demonstrating how utterly *achievable* such a rapid transition from democracy to dictatorship is outside the "safe" boundaries of fantasy, and just how quickly such a transformation can occur. When *The Phantom Menace* was first unleashed in theaters, one of the biggest of the many criticisms lobbed its way was the quick disposition of the villainous Darth Maul (Ray Park), the demon-horned Dark Lord whose black-and-red visage had been omnipresent on that film's expansive array of licensed merchandise. When *Attack of the Clones* arrived three years later, there were similar complaints that Maul's ostensible replacement, Count Dooku (played by the late, great Christopher Lee) didn't get to make much more of a mark (especially considering how quickly he's dispatched at the outset of *Revenge of the Sith*).

While this might seem counter-intuitive, and its efficacy in the films themselves is certainly open to debate, at the very least it does offer an in-universe illustration of the degree to which Ian McDiarmid's Sith Lord Darth Sidious (a.k.a Chancellor Palpatine, who the internet now informs me has been given the first name "Sheev" in the post-Disney age of new canon), ever the master manipulator, was content to move his pawns freely around the board however he pleased. Neither Maul nor Dooku serve a purpose in the larger narrative beyond clearing the decks for poor, stupid Anakin to replace them at the master Sith's side[214]. As such, the fall of

the Republic is the culmination of an extreme long game that encompasses all of Anakin's lifetime, and even stretches back several years before that.

From before the prequels even existed, Lucas had made the argument that those heretofore hidden chapters would provide the necessary background to transform his space epic from "The Adventures of Luke Skywalker" into "The Tragedy of Anakin Skywalker." While the historical record is, at best, opaque as to how far into the series' lifespan Lucas made this mental transition, it's nonetheless an instructive window into how the creator had come to view his creation. *Episodes IV* to *VI*, while not bereft of their dark moments (most of them contained in *The Empire Strikes Back*), are still mostly whiz-bang theme-park rides in the spirit of the *Flash Gordon* serials that first lit the spark in Lucas's mind for what became *Star Wars*.

As such, their conception of good and evil is a black-and-white that's literalized in the wardrobe choices of heroic Luke Skywalker and villainous Darth Vader in the original film. Even the labels given to the rival camps of "Empire" and "Rebellion" make it easy for the audience to pick which side they'd want to be on. The primary conflict in the prequels, however, is between "the Republic" and "the Separatists." The terminology is so vague as to defy easy categorization. In fact, as the opening crawl of *Revenge of the Sith* states in its description of the then-ongoing Clone Wars, "There are heroes on both sides." Well, that certainly makes things more complicated.

Grasping the ideological differences between the two factions requires more than a cursory understanding of the specific interplanetary political divisions at play. Rather, it necessitates the willingness to follow the bouncing ball all the way back to the trade dispute and blockade of the planet Naboo, the inciting incident of *The Phantom Menace*. One complaint that's been voiced repeatedly about the first prequel is how its opening block of text lacks the expositional efficiency of the similar text in *A New Hope*. There, the opposing forces, the stakes, the protagonist, and the antagonist are all neatly laid out in just a few short sentences, starting with "It is a period of civil war."

Instead, right from the jump, *Episode I* has us caught up in some business about "the taxation of trade routes," which makes us feel like we're about to dive headlong into a high school economics textbook. In a sense, this was probably one of the biggest debits noted by audiences who

watched *The Phantom Menace* that first time: While it exists within the same universe and utilizes many of the same touchstones, it somehow feels unconnected from the narrative strands that we'd watched play out over the course of the extant trilogy. The good-evil dichotomy, so easily understood in those films, is largely absent, replaced by something more, to quote Obi-Wan Kenobi, "elusive." The problem is that, in these early goings, Lucas's long game feels just as elusive as he attempts to lay out how huge cultural and societal movements often have innocuous, random starts.

In much the same way that nearly 30 years of seemingly unconnected dominoes needed to topple in a precise sequence to allow for the political rise of Adolf Hitler, the "taxation of trade routes" is just one part of the very intricate process in Lucas's meta-narrative, and it, in turn, metamorphoses over the next decade and change of story time into the Clone Wars of the latter two prequels. Now, all complaints about clubfooted execution notwithstanding, Lucas is basing this movement on an implicit understanding of human nature. Transition from democracy to dictatorship doesn't happen easily or overnight. Rather, dissatisfaction with the status quo and detached disengagement by the general populace in their political process combine to allow it.

The political landscape in *Episode I* has the Republic presided over by the Galactic Senate, which is rife with inaction and corruption. Palpatine, having engineered the Trade Federation's blockade of Naboo while masquerading as that planet's senator, was right to count on the Senate's indolence and inaction to help his rise to and eventual usurpation of power. And despite the fact that Supreme Chancellor Valorum (Terence Stamp) – whom Lucas himself described as "a good man"[215] who he explicitly compared to Bill Clinton – remains an ally to Naboo, Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman) heeds her senator's suggestion to call for a vote of "no confidence." By film's end, Valorum is removed and Palpatine is installed. There is, of course, a bitter irony in Amidala's own naïveté making her responsible for events which would eventually claim her life.

One of the centerpieces of *The Phantom Menace* is the extended pod-race scene in the film's second act. While the race itself stretches to interminable lengths by the time young Anakin wins big, and isn't particularly dramatic, its existence within the universe does point to the bread-and-circuses nature of life in the Outer Rim, where feudal lords (in

this case, Jabba the Hutt) use such savage distractions as a way to draw attention from the questionable manner in which they're providing governance. As established in the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* feature film, Palpatine's alliance with the Hutts is crucial to his ability to retain control.

Of the three prequels, *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* is arguably the weakest. Partly, this can be attributed to "middle movie" syndrome, in that it can have neither a clean beginning nor ending (though *The Empire Strikes Back*, when faced with this exact conundrum, still managed to emerge as arguably the most beloved *Star Wars* movie of all time, so make of that what you will). It can also, however, be chalked up to how much exposition needed to be ladled in, often in unwieldy info-dumps, to fully explicate the lengths to which Palpatine / Sidious has been laying out his plans.

Per *Attack of the Clones*, Palpatine has played both sides of the Republic-Separatist divide against each other, manipulating each faction through his Machiavellian maneuverings. As Darth Sidious, he has fomented dissatisfaction, propping up charismatic ex-Jedi Count Dooku (a.k.a. Darth Tyrranus) to serve as the face of the Separatist cause. All the while, he also uses his position and power as Chancellor of the Republic to engineer an army of clones, allegedly to defend the Republic, but given how similar the clones' armor looks to the stormtroopers of the later films, it's easy to see where things are headed.

Of course, the role of the Jedi, the ostensible heroes of the prequels, is an important one to analyze when contrasting Palpatine's efficacy with their lack of same. Because they're so far behind the eight ball when it comes to the Sith, you can't help but wonder just how rose-colored Ben Kenobi's vision is, in *Episode IV*, when he fondly recalls their glory days. Sure, they may have been around for "over a thousand generations," but while Master Mace Windu (Samuel L. Jackson) and others on the council refer to themselves at various times as "keepers of the peace," there's a passivity to the Jedi in these films that belies the role they're accorded in the overall mythology.

Not only were they completely (one might even say ineptly) unaware of the many behind-the-scenes machinations that allowed for the manufacture of a clone army on Kamino, but they would have *remained* unaware had it not been for continued investigation by Obi-Wan Kenobi. Once Yoda and the Council become aware of the clones, despite the continued questions

surrounding their existence (is a bounty hunter-assassin really the best genetic stock to pull from?), the Jedi are quick to take advantage of them and draft them into service, no questions asked.

When Palpatine activates the Order 66 protocol that turns the clones against their generals, it's an end that the Jedi could – should! – have foreseen if they weren't so wrapped up in their own righteousness. Palpatine's genius, it turns out, wasn't merely in laying out his myriad schemes and watching as they unfolded. Rather, he used the Jedi Order's own entrenched arrogance against them. After so much time keeping watch over the Republic, the notion that they could not only be challenged, but defeated, was one for which they were wholly unprepared, since it was an outcome they never even entertained. Thus, rather than mount a military counteroffensive, the Lord of the Sith simply let the Jedi chase their own tails until it was too late.

Order 66 turned the clone troopers against their generals and led to the galaxy-wide slaughter of the Jedi, like Aayla Secura (Amy Allen), above.

At this stage, it's worth examining the role that Darth Vader plays in the prequel films. While Lucas, in typical revisionist fashion, has stated that he always saw *Star Wars* as Anakin's story, depicting his rise, fall, and redemption, the actual history of the franchise belies this claim. There's more than enough evidence that the Anakin-is-Vader reveal only entered into the creative process sometime during the production of *The Empire Strikes Back*, from 1978 to '79. As such, when Ben first lays out the unpleasant truth in the original film that Vader "betrayed and murdered"

Luke's father, there's no convenient lie, and no "certain point of view," à la *Return of the Jedi* – he's recalling what had actually happened.

Indeed, if you watch the original *Star Wars,* Vader is a thug, a henchman. He's so subservient that, despite his mastery of the Force, he's even being bossed around by various Imperial bureaucrats, something that would become unthinkable just one movie later. In essence, Vader is the "long time ago" equivalent of Jaws or Oddjob in the James Bond movies, serving as the "muscle" for the *real* villain of the piece, Death Star majordomo Grand Moff Tarkin. This all changed by the time *Empire* gave us its climactic reveal – one of the greatest in movie history.

But more than simply throwing theatergoers for a loop, the idea of making Anakin and Vader the same guy also altered the entire trajectory of the franchise. Suddenly, Luke's quest to avenge his father became a quest to *redeem* his father. While that transition went off mostly without a hitch in the original films, it made the 16 years between the conclusion of the original trilogy and the beginning of the prequels a fertile ground wherein fans constructed all manner of scenarios in their own minds about Anakin Skywalker: what he looked like, what kind of a man he was, what could have happened to him, and so forth.

I don't think anyone expected us to end up with the Anakin we got, though. For Lucas, the idea of a good man turning to evil couldn't simply be a result of expediency or hubris, or any of a dozen other failings that are all too common in human nature. No, there had to be some deep-seated childhood trauma that set the otherwise innocent Anakin on his path toward damnation, which is why we first meet the character as a ten-year-old slave in *Episode I*. While events in the film see him released from bondage, he's also separated from his mother at precisely the age when he needs her the most. This separation from a loved one sets the stage for his eventual turn to darkness, and makes his all-consuming fear of also losing Padmé enough of a catalyst for him to do so willingly.

While there is a reflexive tendency toward deriding this as a bad decision, and I can certainly see a cleaner narrative being possible without needing to go into the weeds of child psychology, it was an intriguing decision by Lucas to go in a direction that flies in the face of all those years of expectation that had accrued going into these films. After all, just like Luke, we too had grown up hearing stories of his deceased father. "The best

star pilot in the galaxy," per Ben. "A cunning warrior," also per Ben. And yet, the Anakin we come to know through the prequel films is essentially a broken young man. Damaged goods.

While the duration of the terrific *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* animated series certainly goes a long way toward redeeming the character's essential goodness, it still doesn't erase the petulant, callow youth whom we see in the films. The one who disobeys and argues with his master and ostensible best friend, Obi-Wan Kenobi, at every opportunity. The one who defies sacred Jedi laws and romantically pursues Padmé to satiate his own desires. The Anakin Skywalker of the films is not a particularly heroic character. This robs his fall of a key tragic component, but it certainly falls right in line with Palpatine's long-percolating plans.

At the time of *The Phantom Menace*'s release, Anakin's miraculous virgin birth ("There was no father. I carried him, I gave birth, I raised him. I can't explain what happened," says mother Shmi Skywalker to Liam Neeson's Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn) was derided among many, not only for how it skirts the question of Anakin's paternity (introducing those much-loathed midi-chlorians into the vernacular), but also for how it sets up a bizarre Christ metaphor in the process. However, it's established (or, at least, very heavily implied), in Palpatine's discussions with Anakin in *Revenge of the Sith*, that imbuing midi-chlorians with the ability to create life is a function of the dark side, meaning Shmi (as a woman impregnated by the Force and, by proxy, Palpatine) was unlucky enough to be just one more pawn on the ambitious senator's elaborate chessboard, and that Anakin was a train-wreck long before he waved goodbye to mom on sand-swept Tatooine.

When Anakin is immolated in the fires of the planet Mustafar following his climactic duel with his former friend Obi-Wan, his fiery fate symbolizes not just the dissolution of their partnership, but also the last gasp of the Jedi Order as it existed. Thus, Anakin's turn to the dark side isn't some great fall from grace, so much as it is a broken man arriving at the preordained, inexorable end for which he'd been engineered – which is, in itself, a kind of tragedy. Never explicitly answered by the films is what role the prophecy of the "Chosen One," presumably referring to Anakin,[216] plays in this fall. Was that, too, part of Palpatine's plan?

Ultimately, what's important to recognize is that the original *Star Wars* trilogy is about a group of underdogs who persevere through overwhelming odds and win freedom for the galaxy. The tale of Luke Skywalker and his friends has a premise that's easy to swallow and relate to, and it's not difficult to understand why it has captured the imaginations of several generations of fans since 1977. With the prequel films, George Lucas chose instead to use his science-fiction canvas to illustrate how a series of seemingly small actions can collide with each other and have galaxy-spanning consequences. It's a darker approach to telling a story, but it's no less compelling when told effectively.

16 years after *The Phantom Menace* and a decade after *Revenge of the Sith*, there's no doubt that the *Star Wars* prequels are deeply flawed films. For many of the reasons I've noted in this chapter, and for plenty more reasons that you can find in just about every corner of the internet,[217] I'm certainly not going to defend all of the creative choices therein.

However, their existence as part of one of the most successful franchises of all time, which is the reason they've come in for so much hate, is the very thing that makes them worthy of further study and analysis. George Lucas is too smart a filmmaker not to have known exactly what he was doing when he set about telling this particular story in this particular way.

Top Ten Positive Aspects of the Prequel Trilogy

by Keith DeCandido

Making fun of the three *Star Wars* prequel films – 1999's *The Phantom Menace*, 2002's *Attack of the Clones*, and 2005's *Revenge of the Sith* – is rather akin to shooting fish in a barrel. Rarely have three movies been as aggressively and painstakingly derided as these three have.

In part, it's because the *Star Wars* franchise is so popular, so embedded in the public consciousness that, even if they were great films, they'd be picked apart to no end. The fact that they are generally considered to be dreadful metastasized the effect.

So did the anticipation factor. In 1997, Lucasfilm released the remastered versions of 1977's *Star Wars*, 1980's *The Empire Strikes Back*, and 1983's *Return of the Jedi* on the big screen as the *Special Editions*, whetting folks' appetite for the new films. Two years later, the first prequel hit theaters. The whole world was excited about the movie – until it came out.

Speaking for myself, though, I was dreading the prequel trilogy from pretty much the moment it was announced, because I knew it was guaranteed to be a chronicle of failure.

Think about where we are in the initial trilogy. The only two Jedi Knights left are two eccentric old farts living in exile on remote planets. There's this evil Empire that rules everything. So a prequel trilogy about the heyday of the Jedi Knights and the Republic could only end one way. We know, before we start, that the Jedi will be wiped out and the Republic will fall.

Then *The Phantom Menace* doubled down. First, we got Qui-Gon Jinn, a charismatic character we knew would have to die (because he's never mentioned once in any of the chronologically later films, so he can't be that important in the grand scheme). And then there's an adorable little moppet of a child for whom we're supposed to root, who's actually Anakin Skywalker, the future Darth Vader.

So not only do we have characters who we know will grow old as failures (Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi) or die (every other Jedi), not only do we have a democratic Republic whose days are seriously numbered, but we also have a cute little kid who is going to turn into one of the greatest villains of 20th-Century cinema.

From jump, we're told the prequel trilogy is going to be about the rise of an interstellar Josef Stalin, and our heroes will fail, always.

To make matters worse, not only is that prediction fulfilled, but it's fulfilled to excess. Throughout the entire prequel trilogy, Chancellor Palpatine's plot to overthrow the Republic and set himself up as emperor hits *no* snags, *no* setbacks. At no point do the Jedi ever suspect Palpatine, and they have only the vaguest notion that something bad is happening.

They certainly have no idea that Palpatine manufactured the Clone Wars to give himself more executive powers, nor that he's behind Count Dooku's Separatist movement.

Every victory our heroes achieve is one that Palpatine either planned for, wanted, or can turn to his advantage. They don't even get the occasional incremental victory or win a small battle even though they lose the war. The picture we are painted of the Jedi Knights is one of spectacular incompetence leading to repeated failure. And most of that was predictable before *The Phantom Menace*'s release.

Having said that, it's all well and good to trash the prequel trilogy, and goodness knows plenty of people have (including me, just now). But there *is* good to be found in these three films, and the task I have set before me is to find ten positive aspects of these three movies. And so, without further ado, here are the top ten *good* things about *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith*.

Queen. Senator. Warrior. Lover. Padmé Amidala (Natalie Portman) is commanding throughout the entire prequel trilogy.

1. Padmé Amidala is a Badass

Seriously, this is a woman who is elected the queen of an entire planet while very young (age 14) and then becomes its senator. She is sufficiently well-regarded that the Trade Federation would rather get her signature on a treaty than try to just kill her. Of course, it's for political purposes. Killing her makes her a martyr; getting her to sign the treaty makes her an ally and implies her approval of their actions, which will make those actions easier to sell. Later on, she's important enough in the Senate to justify assassination attempts (that's mostly because the Neimoidians are pissed, but the good guys don't know that – they just know she's a target). The Jedi Knights are supposedly stretched thin, but she's still worth justifying two Jedi assigned to be her personal bodyguards.

Then there are the parts when she kicks ass in a fight. She's impressive enough when trying to take the palace back from the Trade Federation in *The Phantom Menace*. She's also smart enough to have a lookalike decoy (several, actually), which saves her life at the top of *Attack of the Clones*.

But the amazing part is her *tour de force* in the climax of *Clones*. First, there's her insistence on going to Geonosis in the first place because the Jedi won't get there in time to save Obi-Wan. Then, after she and Anakin are captured and chained to a rock along with Obi-Wan in the arena, does she wait for one of her Jedi buddies to set her free? Nah, she gets out on her own – before Anakin and Obi-Wan manage to figure a way out. In the

subsequent fight, she more than holds her own against the big scary monsters and the waves of droid soldiers alongside an army of Jedi and a bigger army of clones (who immediately take her orders when she starts giving them).

Indeed, her presence is commanding throughout the trilogy. She's always the center of attention when she enters a room, and she directs all of the actions around her.

Padmé's badassery falls flat when it comes to Anakin, but one can blame that on love. She does spend the entirety of *Revenge of the Sith* being kind of useless, but that's mostly due to the whole being-pregnant thing, and partly due to Palpatine winning while Padmé is on the side of the vanishingly small number of people who oppose him.

2. Kamino is Awesome

One of the limitations of computer-generated imagery (CGI) – particularly as it was between 1999 and 2005 – is the difficulty in conveying weight. It's one of the reasons why the two *Hulk* movies didn't entirely work: the CGI Hulk didn't give the impression of mass that the big green dude really needs to be effective. The technology has improved in the past decade, to the point at which that wasn't an issue in the *Avengers* movies, but it was often a problem in the *Star Wars* prequels.

This is why Kamino works so well – the clone-masters, Lama Su and Taun We, are light and ethereal. The near-weightless quality of the time period's CGI works in favor of the tall, skinny, wafting clone-masters.

Plus, it is raining constantly there. One of the first tricks special effects guys learned was that rain makes your CGI look better (see also the 1998 *Godzilla* movie). And the rainstorm adds tension to the Obi-Wan/Jango Fett fight scene, as their running around on slanted surfaces without railings is far more dangerous when those surfaces are also wet.

In addition, Kamino continues the franchise's tradition of using weather well. Other excellent examples are the oppressive heat of Tatooine in *A New Hope* and *The Phantom Menace*, the sodden humidity of Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, and the frozen wasteland of Hoth in *Empire*.

3. *Law & Order: Coruscant*

By far, the most compelling aspect of *Attack of the Clones* is Obi-Wan's investigation into the assassination attempt on Padmé. It has a nifty procedural vibe that elevates him as a character, starting with the delightful scene at Dex's Diner. (By the way, that scene is another case in which the CGI works beautifully, as Dexter Jettster, the eatery's owner who acts as Obi-Wan's informant, is a *fantastic* character, both visually and personality-wise.) And then Obi-Wan uses science to determine that there is a planet where his informant said there was, even though it isn't listed in the archives.

What especially works is that Kenobi believes his informant over what archivist Jocasta Nu tells him. The latter is arrogantly sure that if it isn't in the archives, it doesn't exist. But Obi-Wan trusts Dex's word, thanks to a relationship that he's obviously spent years building. And then he notices that something with a gravity field is affecting the area around the empty space in the archives, so he looks deeper. This is some really nifty gumshoe work.

His faking at being Master Sifo-Dyas, the Jedi whom the clone-masters were waiting for, is less than convincing. But at least he accomplishes his goal, even if he needs the rest of the Jedi to bail him out in the end.

Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan MacGregor) battle Darth Maul (Ray Park) in *The Phantom Menace*.

4. Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan vs. Darth Maul

While from a plot standpoint, it isn't especially clear what the point of Darth Maul's climactic fight with the two Jedi *is*, it is nonetheless a damned impressive scene. The choreography is beautifully done, with Ray Park modulating effortlessly from sword techniques (when his weapon acts as a lightsaber) to staff ones (when it becomes a double saber).

But my favorite part of the fight is during the bit when the battle has moved to the rotating force fields, and Qui-Gon and Maul are temporarily separated by those force fields. When that happens, Qui-Gon immediately gets down on his knees into a meditation pose and waits calmly for the fight to continue. It's a nice touch that's right out of Asian martial arts. In fact, if you watch any fighting tournament with participants from Asian martial arts styles, you'll find that if a fight is paused because of an issue with one participant, the other participant immediately goes into *sei-za* – a kneeling meditation stance, very much like what Qui-Gon does – until it is time for the fight to continue. And then, as soon as the force field clears, Qui-Gon leaps to his feet and continues the fight without a moment's hesitation.

In the end, Qui-Gon is killed, but at that point, Darth Maul has proven himself to be a worthy opponent. First rule of badassery: a badass can be convincingly killed if he's taken out by an equal and opposite badass. (One of the reasons why Mace Windu's death in *Revenge of the Sith* is less convincing is that you never believe that Palpatine and Anakin would be able to take him out. Maul, though, proves his worth as a fighting partner, so that you don't feel cheated when he kills Qui-Gon, the way you do when Windu flies out the window to his embarrassing demise.[218] But more on that below...)

5. Hey, Look, Social Commentary!

Revenge of the Sith was very obviously written not just in the shadow of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, but also in the wake of the response to them. In the movie, we see Chancellor Palpatine given more executive powers in order to fuel the war effort, while dissenters are painted as

unpatriotic. Attempts to change the status quo are refuted or beaten down. Anakin, a crony of Palpatine, is given an important position on the Jedi Council for which he is woefully unqualified. And when Palpatine is made emperor, he declares that his ascension will ensure that citizens of the Republic-cum-Empire will live in security.

Oh, and the war itself has been manufactured and has no real cause except for one made up by the guy in charge. It's not a coincidence that this script was written not long after the USA PATRIOT Act was passed and we started a war in Iraq based on a total lie. (Not to mention President George W. Bush giving the position of head of FEMA to the totally unqualified Michael Brown, who utterly screwed up the response to Hurricane Katrina. That actually happened after *Revenge of the Sith* came out, but watching *Sith* on DVD in late 2005 after Katrina, I got goosebumps when Palpatine strong-armed the Jedi Council into making Anakin his liaison.)

In the end, we have Padmé's sad declaration that liberty ends with thunderous applause.

Shortly after *The Phantom Menace*'s release, David Brin wrote an article for Salon.com excoriating the movie, and also predicting that *Episode III* would be "a real bummer of a movie: Coruscant and a zillion other planets are gonna have to fry as the emperor takes over, since that would only happen over the dead bodies of every decent citizen with any spirit."[219]

In 2005, those words sounded charmingly naïve, given that civil rights had been trampled by the PATRIOT Act, the United States had adopted the despicable practice of torture as an interrogation tool, and, in addition to the unsuccessful "War on Terror" (the goals of which weren't met until 2011 under a different president), a second war in Iraq was manufactured. The few who complained about this were shouted down as unpatriotic bastards. (You'll find plenty of people complaining about all that stuff *now*, of course, but at the time? Not so much. That was the atmosphere in which Lucas wrote *Sith*.)

6. "This Party's Over"

For the most part, the prequel trilogy is a master class in how to make brilliant actors look boring. Natalie Portman, Liam Neeson, Terence Stamp,

Christopher Lee, Ray Park, and Hayden Christensen – if you'd only seen them in the *Star Wars* films, you'd have no idea that these were immensely talented actors. Some were able to shine through the monotonous dialogue and lackluster direction – Portman, Neeson, and Lee, in particular, have their moments – but most are lifeless and uninteresting at best, actively awful at worst. (Christensen, in particular, comes across like he's in a high school production of a badly written love story.)

Nowhere is this more evident than Mace Windu. It takes incredible talent (for lack of a better word) to make Samuel L. Jackson boring, but somehow director George Lucas managed it – three times. Windu is dull and passionless.

With one exception: the moment he arrives at the arena on Geonosis in *Attack of the Clones*, puts the purple lightsaber of doom to Jango Fett's neck, and stares at Dooku, declaring, "This party's over." It's what the TV Tropes website refers to as a "crowning moment of awesome." For that one second, we see the Jackson who had played Jules in *Pulp Fiction* and would go on to play Nick Fury in the Marvel Comics films, and we know that Dooku's toast. In case we doubt it, we later see Master Windu and Obi-Wan fighting back to back, and it's *beautiful*.

Earlier, I cast aspersions on Windu's final scene, as I just never bought that Palpatine and Anakin could contrive to get Windu killed, and one of the reasons for that is the arena scene in *Clones*. Palpatine is a schemer, not a fighter, and Anakin is a whiny twerp – even combined, they are *not* an equal and opposite badass. Having said that, I do like the fact that Windu is responsible for Palpatine looking like a raisin, as he did in *Return of the Jedi*. He gets that in, at least, before being sent to a most ignominious death.

Emperor Sheev Palpatine – also known as Darth Sidious – fights with Jedi Master Mace Windu (Samuel L. Jackson) shortly before the latter's demise… and the former's transformation into

a raisin.

7. Ewan McGregor is Amazing

Speaking of Obi-Wan, the actor playing him is one big exception to the above comment about making folks boring.

From the first time he opens his mouth in *The Phantom Menace*, McGregor makes a complete believer out of everyone in the universe that he would grow older and become Alec Guinness. With each subsequent film, he grows closer and closer to the sad old man we met in *A New Hope*. In *Phantom*, it is really just his voice. In *Attack of the Clones*, he grows the familiar beard, but it's not until *Revenge of the Sith* that we see the beginnings of the defeated hermit who will recruit Luke on Tatooine. It's a subtle evolution, one brilliantly handled by McGregor throughout the three films, showing us a convincing aging and maturing process that we already know the end of.

Along the way, we get an Obi-Wan who is talented, complex, and evolving – though much of it seems to happen in the background. For all that McGregor gets top billing in two of the films, he's not really the trilogy's protagonist, and that is one of the biggest blown opportunities. Instead of being about Anakin's rise and fall, the trilogy would have been much more compelling had it been about Obi-Wan. Then, at least, it would be about a tragic hero instead of the creation of a villain – plus, McGregor is far less whiny than Hayden Christensen.

We could observe Obi-Wan coming out of his mentor's shadow, trying to properly fulfill Qui-Gon's dying wish by training Anakin, and having the focus be on his inability to see his student going to the dark side – or, better yet, his seeing it but not being able to do anything about it. What we do see of Obi-Wan in the trilogy proves categorically that McGregor would have been more than up to the task, as we get tantalizing glimpses of what could have been with McGregor's subtle evolution of the character.

8. Tatooine Looks Lived in

One of most impressive aspects of *Star Wars* back in 1977 was that it gave us, in Tatooine, a world that isn't a gleaming, shining example of futuristic tech. No, this is a sand-choked desert where everything is dull,

battered, dented, and dirty, from Obi-Wan's hovel to the Mos Eisley cantina. It's also the best part of *The Phantom Menace* – in direct contrast to the elegant architecture and fancy costumes of Naboo and the shining spires of Coruscant, Tatooine shows us the other side of life in the galaxy far, far away. These people are poor, their homes ramshackle and hastily thrown together, and their clothes threadbare.

The pod race is the best example of this: a bunch of vehicles that are old, grimy, dented, and kit-bashed from spare parts. Tatooine has a lack of sterility that is missing from much of the rest of the franchise, particularly the other parts of the prequel trilogy (even the volcanic planet of Mustafar, the site of Obi-Wan's and Anakin's climactic battle, is a little too clean).

Darth Vader, formerly Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen) turns his back literally and figuratively on both Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan MacGregor) and the Jedi Order by the end of *Revenge of the Sith*.

9. "You were My Brother, Anakin!"

The hardest job *Revenge of the Sith* has is to give us a fight between Obi-Wan and Anakin that is worthy of all the buildup that fight had had since 1977. (And also to make up for the Obi-Wan vs. Vader fight in *A New Hope*, which ended disappointingly quickly, with Ben seemingly just giving up. Darth Vader and the older Obi-Wan *were* equal and opposite badasses, but the fight's conclusion did not live up to the billing.)

To Lucas's credit, he manages it. The fight on Mustafar is brutal, lengthy, and a visual feast, taking place as it does in and around tons of lava flows. In particular, you can tell that these are two people who know each other's fighting styles – which only makes sense, as Obi-Wan trained Anakin, and so they've likely sparred any number of times. As a result, we get constant stalemate, and the only time anyone truly gains the upper hand

is when Obi-Wan achieves higher ground and Anakin – despite being warned by his mentor – tries to attack from below. The result is the loss of Anakin's last remaining hand and both feet, and his eventually burning alive, necessitating a big black suit with a life-support system and a raspy ventilator.

10. Trisha Biggar is Amazing

Biggar was the costume designer for the prequel trilogy, and she deserves more accolades than anyone else involved with these films, because she did an *amazing* job. Her brilliance is most obvious in the various outfits worn by Naboo officials, from Palpatine's robes in *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack of the Clones* particularly to the Harlequin-style raiment worn by the various queens of Naboo to pretty much every outfit Padmé wears as a senator, not to mention the cool uniforms worn by the Naboo military.

But there's plenty of kudos to go around, from the cloaks of the Kamino clone-masters to the ornate robes of the Neimoidians to the Jedi robes.

Holy crap, the Jedi robes. Seriously, how can you see someone in those flowing robes, those boots, and those cloaks, and not think, "Oh, man, I am *not* messing with *that* person?"

* * *

So see? One *can* say good things about the prequel trilogy! Costumes! Acting! Cool subplots! Interesting characters!

With new movies on the horizon, it's likely that people will want to go back and re-watch the previous films, and many will question whether or not they *really* want to suffer through these three stories. So consider the above essay your primer on what to focus on when you steel yourself to revisit *The Phantom Menace, Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith*.

What's So Dark About the Dark Side? Good, Evil, and the Spectrum of Compassion in the *Star Wars* Saga

by Rocko Jerome

> The interesting thing about *Star Wars* – and I didn't ever really push this very far, because it's not really that important – but there's a lot going on there that most people haven't come to grips with yet. But when they do, they will find it's a much more intricately made clock than most people would imagine.
>
> —George Lucas, *Vanity Fair*, February 2005[220]

When one speaks of the struggle at the root of every chapter of the *Star Wars* saga, it almost always boils down to the basic, maybe even pedantic (depending on who you are talking to) old chestnut of good versus evil. There's the light side of the Force and there's the dark side. Those on the light side are virtuous and good, the types who live to serve all that is right in the galaxy. Those on the dark side, by contrast, are cruel and villainous, prone to strangling their own minions and murdering the innocent for little or no reason.

In the original film – the one that forms the basis of how this series of movies will be perceived until Disney produces enough of them that there are too many to watch in a single weekend, and enough time has gone by that the average mall theatergoer will be as unlikely to recall who Harrison Ford is as a Hot Topic customer today would be able to tell you three things about Burt Lancaster – this simple "nice versus mean" dichotomy is especially prevalent.

In 1977, the release of *Star Wars* was welcomed as a new, big break in what was becoming a lexicon of science-fiction material that had forgotten

how to just exist as pure, whimsical joy. *A New Hope* wasn't an allegory for Vietnam, Watergate, racism, social injustice, or anything existential at all. Timed perfectly by happenstance with disco's ascendance, the movie was celebrated as a complete release – a good-time thrill ride, a way to forget your troubles and tribulations for an hour and a half, and to refrain from asking yourself even as simple a question as "Why are the explosions in outer space audible?"

Star Wars became cemented right away as the science fiction to which you turned if you didn't feel like thinking too much. If you felt like being bummed out, you still had *2001: A Space Odyssey* to fall back on. Hell, even a flick as corny and hammy as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* still had a message. As radio spots advertised at the time, *Star Wars* was "all for fun."

However, *The Empire Strikes Back*, as has been pointed out numerous times, complicates matters. In this movie, the first signs emerge that the villain in the black hat wasn't always evil, and perhaps the possibility exists that the callow young space farmboy might just potentially follow suit. However, "I am your father" and all it entails and signifies has been dissected more times than the common frog, so let's shift focus a bit.

As Luke Skywalker (with R2-D2 in tow) trains on Dagobah, and while Han Solo, Leia Organa, and the rest of the gang hide out in Cloud City, we start to see our first glimpses of the rigidity in the old Jedi Order. Yoda initially outright refuses to have anything to do with Luke, as he is "too old..." at all of 22. But what becomes clear, on repeated viewings, is that the big-eared wiseass might just have been toying with our hero, trying to manipulate him into reacting a certain way. Yoda perpetually goads Luke, sort of the bad cop to Obi-Wan Kenobi's good cop in the old interrogation routine, similarly designed to break down the subject and build him back up again as something else.

There's a very pivotal point at the end of Luke's time on Dagobah (which is a frustratingly indeterminable amount of time, for those of us who think deeply about such things) that few fans ever seem to recognize. Pay attention, as this will come up again later. Luke senses that his friends are being tormented. He must go to them. Yoda tells him essentially that they aren't worth it, their lives are insignificant in the bigger picture, and completing his training is more important. But Luke dismisses the little

green man who would forever redefine little green men, flying off to face a much more powerful enemy for the love of his friends, the people (and Wookiee, and robots) who had become his family.

Obi-Wan Kenobi (Sir Alec Guinness) and Yoda (Frank Oz), the sole surviving Jedi Council members, contemplate Luke Skywalker's fate.

Yoda urges him to put his training ahead of his concern for his friends. Obi-Wan even appears in his astral form, stating, "Even Yoda cannot see their fate... This is a dangerous time for you, where you will be tempted by the dark side of the Force." Luke promises to return after saving his friends, and Yoda frowns.

When we only had these first two movies to consider, Luke's confrontation with Darth Vader seemed to play out as just more manipulation. James Earl Jones famously said that in reading his lines for voiceover, he believed that the Dark Lord of pop-cultural myth had to be lying when he claimed to be Luke's father – how could Vader have ever been a virtuous enough character to parent this saga's hero? Especially since this turnabout would reveal Obi-Wan to be a liar at worst, and a teller of half-truths at best. "Ben, why didn't you tell me?" Luke cries.

Of course, his name wasn't even Ben.

Return of the Jedi seems to be the film with which the fanbase breaks, if you put much stock in the internet. IMDb ratings reveal it to be the least well-regarded of the original trilogy. Part of that, no doubt, is retroactive childhood Ewok resentment on the part of fandom, but a bit may also lie in Darth Vader's redemptive streak. Fans expecting Luke to triumph by finally killing Vader in battle would be disappointed to find that he instead turns his father back to the light side, and that it is *Vader* who sees to the demise of the trilogy's ultimate villain, a cackling Wicked Witch of the West-style

creature who we effectively only meet in that film. (Note that the original scene featuring the Emperor in *The Empire Strikes Back* was a somewhat different character, a sort of baboon-eyed entity with a freaky, mellow bearing more reminiscent of Jim Jones than a storybook witch, and has since been replaced in every rereleased version.)

Emperor Palpatine's character is an entirely unsympathetic monster in *Return of the Jedi*, a manipulative high priest of evil with no apparent motivation beyond conquering and destroying. And so, the original trilogy ended with good ultimately triumphing over evil, and the film saga would remain no deeper a philosophical quandary than that for the next two decades of unending fan discussions.

The prequels brought to the mix a whole new sense of relativity in the struggle between right and wrong. In depicting the fall of Anakin Skywalker, these films illustrated a sense of equipoise in the methods of the Jedi and Sith that many likely overlooked. Whereas Darth Vader is an icon of evil until the very end of the original trilogy, the arc of the newer movies showed just how a sense of insecurity turned the well-intentioned hero into a monster... and how the hubris of the Jedi Order ultimately failed him, allowing that insecurity to grow and fester, even adding to it.

There has been much debate about the quality of the prequels, and there's certainly room for criticism, but let's put aside their execution and instead focus on the concepts intrinsic in the basic narrative.

Most of what we had known about the presumably glorious and perfectly benevolent Jedi Order was still a mystery at the time that *The Phantom Menace* arrived in theaters. The first Jedi we meet about whom we don't already know is Qui-Gon Jinn. We learn that this new protagonist had bristled against the rigidity of the Jedi Order, and it is hinted that he may have been held down in their echelon because of it. Once he brings young Anakin before the Jedi Council, their frustration with him is palpable.

After telling the council of his encounter with Darth Maul, Qui-Gon waits and does not dismiss himself immediately. Yoda asks if he has more to say. As Obi-Wan looks on concerned, Qui-Gon speaks: "With your permission, my master, I have encountered a vergence in the Force." He goes on to explain that he believes he has encountered the one fated to bring balance to the Force. Although condescendingly reluctant, they agree to test Anakin.

Jedi Master Qui-Gon Jinn looks sagely at his Padawan learner, Obi-Wan Kenobi, in *The Phantom Menace*.

Later, Obi-Wan scoldingly expresses his concern, warning, “Do not defy the Council, master. Not again… If you would just follow the Code, you would be *on* the Council... They will not go along with you this time.”

“You still have much to learn, my apprentice,” is Qui-Gon’s only reply.

There is certainly not a complete lack of respect here, but it is clear that only Qui-Gon would even begin to consider taking on Anakin as a Padawan learner at the ripe old age of nine. Although it hearkens back to Yoda’s feeling that Luke is too old to train in *The Empire Strikes Back*, the idea that the Jedi specialize in completely removing very young Force-sensitive children from their families and indoctrinating them is a bit jarring, and it could be construed that the Jedi aren’t so perfect after all. Their future fatal blind spots begin to come into view.

When testing the boy, the Council virtually browbeats him. Yoda scolds him for feeling fear and concern for his mother, as if these natural feelings are unworthy of a Jedi. Later, they issue their decree: he is too old. But Qui-Gon won’t stand for it. “He is the Chosen One. You must see it.” Yoda’s only comment: “Hmmmm. Clouded, this boy’s future is.”

Even Obi-Wan agrees with the Council regarding the boy’s potential dangerousness, and questions Qui-Gon about his inability to see the portents.

Without Qui-Gon’s death and Obi-Wan’s eventual willingness to train the boy – which only comes about as a result of his dying mentor’s insistence – it could be presumed that Anakin would have been left alone to his own devices on Tatooine, happy and healthy with his mother despite

their limitations and indignities. Anakin realizing his potential as the Chosen One becomes all-important, and (as the Jedi seem willing and eager to do so frequently) disrupting the lives of common people is a small price to pay to maintain order in the galaxy, even over an unclear and somewhat imposing prophecy that they fail to thoroughly consider – the one who would bring balance to the Force would ultimately do so by seeing almost every user of it dead *on both sides* by the time of his own demise.

When we meet the Sith Lords and learn of the Rule of Two, they are cast as somewhat relatable characters, due to their resentment of the galactic control exerted by the Jedi. This is an unexpected twist. They are certainly still villainous, but the undercurrent of their intentions seems to be, at its root, a populist one. Who are the Jedi to decide what is best? It isn't hard to get a sense of how one could fall in with the Sith instead.

In *Attack of the Clones*, we encounter Count Dooku, a man who had served as Qui-Gon's teacher in years long past. Dooku had defected – once a Jedi who held differences with the Order, he became a full-blown Sith under the secret moniker of Darth Tyranus, having apparently replaced the fallen Darth Maul during the time since the previous film. As Christopher Lee has done in so many roles before, he brings a great sense of pathos to the character, and so Dooku comes across as no mere cackling villain, but rather a fully realized character of whom we only see small pieces, the proverbial tip of the narrative iceberg. His origin story is left completely off-screen, and so it is subject to conjecture.

Setting aside his appearances in published material (which, as every fan knows, is secondary and prone to being deemed as having "never happened" should the films contradict any of it), we could certainly assume that Qui-Gon's rebellious tendencies had been fostered by Dooku. We could imagine that Dooku had grown up under the Jedi, perhaps never having completely been a model Padawan. Somewhere along the way, he must have decided that the Order was no longer a thing to which to aspire, and the answer does not seem as simple as "he turned evil."

Dooku heads a coalition of systems that have grown weary of both the Galactic Senate and the Jedi Order, many of them withering in the shadow of that "greater good." It could be construed that the Sith are merely manipulating sentiment in order to start a war for no other reason than to create chaos. However, in every bit of the rhetoric exposed by the villains of

the piece, their primary goal is not to end lives or reap mayhem, but rather to free themselves and the galaxy from what they view as the oppression of the Jedi. It would be a bit silly to try to paint the obvious villains of the story as heroes; but certainly, Dooku and Palpatine are not simple "men in black hats" existing to only give the virtuous heroes a reason to fight.

In response to his being called a traitor, an apologetic Count Dooku tells a captive Obi-Wan that his cohorts have gone too far in binding him and holding him hovering in stasis, but that he has great respect for the young Jedi. "It's a great pity that our paths have never crossed before, Obi-Wan. Qui-Gon always spoke very highly of you." Could it have been Dooku's influence that made Qui-Gon the iconoclast that he was? Is it possible that the Jedi eventually training Anakin was some sort of a long-range, long-game conspiracy?

"I wish he were still alive," Dooku laments. "I could use his help right now."

Obi-Wan is in disbelief, certain his old mentor would never aid the Count. Dooku's response is direct: "Don't be so sure, my young Jedi. He knew all about the corruption in the Senate, but he would not have gone along with it if he learned the truth, as I have."

Now, it's here, at this point, that we see some clear manipulation from the Count, even if he isn't entirely lying. "What if I told you that the Senate was under the control of a Dark Lord of the Sith?" he asks. Dooku, of course, omits the fact that he serves that same Dark Lord... "The dark side of the Force has clouded the vision of the Jedi, my friend. Hundreds of senators are now under the control of a Sith Lord named Darth Sidious." Note that Dooku is telling the truth here, just omitting certain details – much like Obi-Wan had done with Luke by not directly telling him the truth about his father.

For Anakin's part, it seems that Lucas, always a fan of 1950s culture, cast his protagonist in the James Dean mold: an emotive and rebellious sort, perhaps not just a little obnoxious in his bearing. He breaks a rule and makes a run to Tatooine to check on his mother, indulging in those types of attachments that Jedi do not allow. Finding her barely hanging on to life in the imprisonment of Sand People, only to have her die in his arms, he breaks another Jedi rule and slaughters those responsible for her demise. No one could blame him for that, but he goes a step further. As he later tells

Padmé Amidala, he didn't stop with the men, but also killed the women and children. Perhaps by holding Anakin away from his full spectrum of feelings, the Jedi inadvertently allow him to grow drunk on forbidden fruit once he tastes it.

There's a moment in the film that harkens back (or forward, depending on how you look at it) to that moment in *The Empire Strikes Back* between Luke and Yoda, and gives great credence to Lucas's words about the entire six-movie epic being a bit deeper than most realize.

Padmé, a true ally of the Jedi, falls from her craft and is in danger. Anakin wants to stop the pursuit of Dooku and help her, perhaps even save her. Obi-Wan scolds him for this and makes him out to be an impetuously foolish youth, warning, "You will be expelled from the Jedi Order!" The question is obvious: For trying to help someone? Are the Jedi so focused on maintaining greatness in the galaxy that taking even a moment from attempting to catch up to and destroy an enemy, in order to prevent the death of an innocent, would be an offense worthy of dismissal?

In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Obi-Wan tells Luke, "It is you and your abilities that the Emperor wants. That is why your friends are made to suffer." Luke is much more resolute than his father had been. "That's why I have to go," he tells his master.

"Luke, I don't want to lose you the way I lost Vader," Obi-Wan urges him. Perhaps he never quite learned that addressing the real concerns of his apprentice was a thing of value, and so when Luke promises, "You won't," he only takes it as misplaced and inconvenient rebellion. As Yoda and Obi-Wan continue to bear down on him, Luke vows not to fall to the dark side, then goes to the aid of his friends.

Anakin instead chooses to go along with the program, and of course, Padmé proves quite capable of taking care of herself, but the parallel between Anakin's decision and that of his son later is clear: both men put being a Jedi above their inclination to do right by someone they care about. Ultimately, Anakin listening to the Jedi results in absolute catastrophe, whereas Luke's unwillingness to sacrifice his friends to serve some vague higher purpose puts him on the path to ending the war and strife that had been engulfing the entire galaxy for decades.

Star Wars, as a whole, means a great many things to a countless legion of fans across the planet. Virtually anywhere that a television could be

turned on, at least one chapter has lit up a living room. The ultimate theme of the saga is entirely subjective, but one way it could be construed is as a story about the importance of valuing friendship.

The protagonists of the original trilogy form a rag-tag family of misfits, characters with hardened backgrounds who find heart: a drug trafficker, his loyal best friend honor-bound to remain at that outlaw's side, a member of royalty turned freedom fighter by bad circumstances culminating in the destruction of her adopted home planet, a couple of knocked-around robots, and a young man who grew up in forced solitude as an orphan with no real sense of purpose until meeting his de facto family. These individuals ultimately fulfill each other's needs and help the others become better people. The support network provided by their genuine acts of above-and-beyond compassion leads to triumph for all – even for the bad guy. The men risk their lives to save the princess, then the group goes to incredible lengths to save their most skullduggerous member, and finally, the heart is found under layer upon layer of black ice. Luke's friends help make him the man he must be in order to do what needs to be done, and that happens directly because of Luke's disregard of Yoda's orders.

Anakin, however, has no such ties. He is taken from his mother past the age at which he would never forget her, to be raised by passionless monks who drum into him the idea that falling in love is wrong and attachments, even to one's parents, are foolish. The Jedi teach him that the very qualities that make an entity whole are to be avoided. So naturally, when the Sith come calling and cultivate his discontent, they find their job all too easy.

Revenge of the Sith, true to its name, is the culmination of all of this. The film represents the final point at which the clash of ideas about what is right and what is expected occurs.

The opening crawl of *Revenge of the Sith* spells out a different sense of balance than had been previously expressed up to that point in the film series: "There are heroes on both sides. Evil is everywhere." Just who are these heroes and villains on both sides, and are we to presume that there is evil inside the Jedi Order as well? Or is this just meant to refer to Palpatine's thorough infiltration of the Galactic Senate? It's left a bit too murky a matter to presume that Lucas's intention was not to hint at the basic imperfection of intelligent life, at least on some level.

There’s not too much one can say to shed any virtue in killing school-age children, so we can assume that by that point in the film, Anakin is absolutely engulfed in evil. It is this descent that adds a relatable dimension to his story. The popular conception we had anticipated as viewers was that Vader been seduced by evil manipulation, but the story that unfolds instead implicates the Jedi’s failed rhetoric in Anakin’s fall.

Troubled by images of his beloved wife dying in pain, Anakin must avoid discussing the particulars of what causes him stress and strife with the very people upon whom he should have been able to rely. For a Jedi to take a spouse is absolutely and implicitly forbidden, and in beating around the bush while seeking council from Yoda, he is told that it isn’t his concern for someone that is the problem; it’s the fact that he has attachments in the first place that is the source of all of his tribulation.

Chancellor Palpatine continues his seduction of Anakin toward the dark side by revealing the Sith’s ability to conquer death.

Yoda’s spiel is a familiar one: “The fear of loss is a path to the dark side,” he warns. “Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them, do not. Miss them, do not. Attachment leads to jealousy. The shadow of greed, that is. […] Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose.”

Yoda might just be the most important philosopher of modern popular culture, but it’s striking that he would be so wrongheaded in his advice to

Anakin. It might seem funny to consider the “humanity” of *Star Wars* characters (since even the ones that look like humans are never explicitly described as such, and many of the most relatable characters are actually aliens or automatons), but there’s no question that there is a great big heart at the center of the saga. In this moment, Yoda, often considered a warm and somewhat grandfatherly character, fails miserably to properly counsel an apprentice in need, practically pushing open the door for Palpatine to make his move and complete his recruitment.

Palpatine hints that he had killed his own master, even as he expresses the virtues of the “unnatural” dark side of the Force. Preventing the death of loved ones, even *having* loved ones, is a part of his pitch toward exploring the concepts and powers that the Jedi had expressly forbidden. Anakin can *only* make the choice that would devastate the galaxy, and the Jedi ultimately fail to notice, but at no point in the original trilogy does either Yoda or Obi-Wan express any sort of understanding of this failure on their parts.

When Palpatine and Yoda battle, Palpatine displays a sort of affection for Anakin that none in the Jedi Order ever seem to offer. To Yoda, left crawling away after the skirmish, no expression on the matter is palpable. Perhaps he only regrets not turning Anakin away as a child to begin with.

For his part, Obi-Wan would face his ultimate failure of Anakin. During their fateful battle, Obi-Wan tells him as much: “I have failed you, Anakin. I have failed you.” Obi-Wan calls the Sith evil, but Anakin counters that from his point of view, it is the Jedi who are evil. In a line that perhaps underscores the sometimes clueless nature of the Jedi, Obi-Wan shoots back, “Only the Sith deal in absolutes!”

Isn’t saying “only” about anyone a clear indication that the speaker deals in absolutes?

After Obi-Wan cripples his erstwhile student, leaving him a scarred husk, we witness what is easily the most heartfelt, emotionally heavy exchange of the prequels.

“I hate you!” Anakins screams in fury.

“You were my brother, Anakin,” an anguished Obi-Wan replies. “I loved you.” And yet, despite that love, he leaves Anakin to presumably die a fiery, agonizing death instead of administering a mercy killing.

The *Star Wars* saga is about many things, but the ultimate theme might be the power of friendship. Anakin has very little in the way of compassionate companionship, and instead deals with misunderstanding and cold logic birthed from an era of adherence to a code that would soon be eradicated. Instead of being allowed to openly have and express feelings for his beloved, he must live a secret double life. His son Luke instead finds friends who do not judge him or prevent him from being who he is, and he puts their safety and security above any rhetoric. The moment at which he grows assertive enough to tell Yoda he won't listen to him but will follow his heart instead, Luke takes the first step out of a cosmic stalemate and ultimately saves the galaxy.

And so, perhaps this is the primary dial on that clock to which Lucas referred. Somewhat subversively, perhaps *Star Wars* is about choosing your own path instead of having one dictated to you.

Our Actions Define Our Legacy: A Look at *The Clone Wars*

by David Pipgras

> "You fought in the Clone Wars?"
> "Yes, I was once a Jedi Knight, the same as your father."
> —Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi, *Star Wars*

With the above revelation, Luke's destiny, not to mention what he knew about his father, would be forever changed. For us, the mere viewers, this seemingly insignificant exchange would spark a debate that would last for almost the next 25 years, providing explanations that ranged from the mundane to the fantastic.

Fans yearned to know more about these so-called Clone Wars. What were they? How did they start? What exactly was meant by the name "Clone Wars?" Were these a series of battles fought with clones? Against clones? Clones fighting clones? Who were these clones and where did they come from? How did the wars end? Why did they end? Were these, perhaps, a series of smaller wars that were similar enough to appear to be clones of each other?

And yet, as the original trilogy progressed, there was no further mention of the Clone Wars, or of clones in general. And so they faded into the background… at least, for a little while.

As the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe (EU) began to take shape (as early as the original Marvel comic book series), interest in the Clone Wars popped up from time to time as different characters were introduced, or familiar ones were explored. Several explanations were proposed and

mostly dismissed, while others took hold and offered different, often radical ideas.

One particularly unlikely idea proposed by fans during the early stages of *Episode I*'s planning was that Obi-Wan may, in fact, have been a clone himself. His name, they surmised, was not Obi-Wan, as we'd been led to believe, but rather OB-1, a designation given to the first clone of "old Ben Kenobi." While in the end, this did not prove even remotely close, it did lead to a lot of interesting discussion among enthusiasts.

Jumping ahead some 25 years into the past (yes, you read that right), we were anxiously awaiting the release of *The Phantom Menace* in the hopes of finally learning more about the mysterious Clone Wars. Unfortunately, much to the dismay of the fans, we only got a little tease in that first prequel. Even after the 2002 release of *Attack of the Clones*, we would end up having to wait another three years, until 2005 and the unveiling of *Revenge of the Sith*, for a better (although still incomplete) understanding of the events encompassing the Clone Wars.

Attack of the Clones

The first sequel to the prequel, *Attack of the Clones*, offers us a small taste of what is to come. After enduring the anguish of watching Obi-Wan struggle with a puzzle so complex and extremely difficult that only a pint-sized Jedi youngling could answer it, we learn of the mysterious death of (a previously unknown) Jedi Master named Sifo-Dyas. Then, following a battle with Boba Fett's father (sort of), we are at last introduced to… the clones!

An investigation leading to the cloning facility on Kamino reveals that the (old) Galactic Republic had, unbeknownst to them, apparently commissioned a million-plus clones to be produced, based on the DNA of a bounty hunter known as Jango Fett.

It was not until the Battle of Geonosis that the true magnificence of the clones would be fully revealed… and the fans were (mostly) excited to see a progenitor of the Imperial stormtrooper in new, yet familiar, armor similar to Fett's Mandalorian design. And when these newly introduced soldiers displayed not only competent military thinking, but also an ability to hit a

moving target while running into (not away from) the battle, we knew we were onto something good.

Although we really only got to see the standard Clone Trooper in action, if you were paying attention, you could see early versions of snowtroopers, desert troopers and other various classifications in the background. It was finally good to be a fan again, especially if you were more interested in the Empire than the Rebels.

Revenge of the Sith

Just as the previous movie had set up the massive potential for what these clones could represent and what was yet to come, the next movie would sucker-punch fans in the stomach by quickly ending the Clone Wars with the announcement of the Empire's formation. While we got to see what some of these clones could do, making up a little bit for the sloppy, often laughable stormtroopers, the ride ended all too quickly as they turned against their Jedi generals and pretty much everyone else.

While for George Lucas, this was perhaps enough to tell the story he wanted to tell, it left fans with many more questions: Why did the clones so easily betray the Jedi whom they had fought alongside? What exactly was Order 66 and how did it work? Did the clones know about the order and keep it hidden? If so, how? And how were Jedi even as powerful as Yoda unable to sense the coming doom?

Of course, this doesn't even scratch the surface of questions about the clones themselves. What happened to them all by the time of the events of *A New Hope*? Were there still clone troopers among the Imperial ranks? Did some choose not to obey the secretive and deadly order?

We would never know. Or would we?

After *Revenge of the Sith*, Lucasfilm decided to tease fans again with news about an upcoming television series based on the Clone Wars setting. Fans were naturally anxious and excited to learn more, but apprehensive (okay, terrified) about setting their expectations too high, for fear of disappointment at what the previous attempts at a *Star Wars*-based television show had brought (e.g., Ewoks). And really, how could you blame them?

Clone Wars – Take One

In 2003, Lucasfilm brought us the original *Star Wars: Clone Wars*, a two-dimensional animated series directed by Genndy Tartakovsky of *Samurai Jack* fame, which takes place during the three-year period between *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. The series follows the adventures of Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Mace Windu, Padmé Amidala, Yoda, Mace Windu, and other central characters as they battle the Confederacy of Independent Systems, as well as the Sith.

The series introduces several new characters, most notably the fan-favorite fallen-Jedi-turned-Sith-assassin Asajj Ventress. It also, in a later episode, features a Jedi who looks remarkably like Scooby-Doo's pal, Norville "Shaggy" Rogers. His name, according to starwars.com? Sha'a Gi, of course.

The show also introduces some truly bad characters – and I don't mean the *evil* kind of bad, just the *bad* kind of bad (well, technically they were evil, too). Chief among these is a male Gen'Dai bounty hunter known as Durge. It all goes downhill from there.

Originally designed by the fine folks at Lucasfilm specifically for *Clone Wars*, Durge was not only supposed to be something of a badass super-villain (and perhaps fodder for a few action figures), but also someone who would provide a legitimate challenge for the Jedi. Unfortunately for fans, the character's backstory would be written so badly as to make him something of a masochistic "Mary Jane" character: he went from being a highly skilled bounty hunter who could kick Jedi butt to a big, bad, super-powered, seemingly indestructible, machine-human hybrid who is near-immortal, has lived for more than 2,000 years, and kills Mandalorians and Jedi for fun. Oh, and let's toss in the fact that he has grown insane over the years as his super-body continuously attempts to re-grow over his super suit of armor (given to him by something of a mad scientist, nonetheless). I am sure there could have been a few more cliché traits shoved in, had the character become even remotely popular.

Thankfully, someone else at Lucasfilm created the character of General Grievous, and George wanted him introduced in the cartoon, so Durge had to disappear – but how do you kill off an immortal character bent on the

destruction of the (central) Jedi? Why, in a way only befitting his stature: having Anakin Force-push him into a star. Sigh.

On the one hand, it is good to see original characters introduced who are not from the movies, even if they are weakly conceived, but on the other hand, it goes to show that if the creative process does not have direction, you get this type of hot mess. I give credit for knowing when to pull the plug, but at the same time wonder how much better the original cartoon series could have been with a more realistic adversary.

The series was originally produced by Cartoon Network in association with Lucasfilm. Ten two-to-three-minute "micro-episodes" made up the first two seasons, with five longer episodes of 12 to 15 minutes apiece comprising a third season, for a total of 25 chapters. These would later be released on DVD as *Clone Wars Volumes 1* and *2*.

Since the time for each episode was at a premium, the writers needed to be careful about how they spent each minute. Like any show, there were moments of absolute brilliance, but the cost of trying something new means you occasionally end up with moments better spent on the cutting-room floor. Thankfully, with the limited time, there was far less attention given to the political aspect (for which the prequels over-compensated), and the action scenes were fast and furious (only minus Vin Diesel).

Perhaps the most shining example of "less talk, more action" is that fact that, unlike in the films, Mace Windu is actually a badass Jedi Master who shows that he has powerful Force skills and has truly earned his seat at the head of the Jedi Council, and not just the mediocre Jedi politician whom we were shown in the movies (with all due respect to Samuel Jackson, who I think did a great job, considering what little he had to work with).

The story takes place about three months after the Battle of Geonosis, chronicling Anakin's rise from Padawan to Jedi Knight, and touching on his eventual fall and inevitable rise as Darth Vader.

In the first volume, following an invasion of the planet Muunilinst, home to the Intergalactic Banking Clan, Anakin battles Count Dooku and his apprentice Asajj. As the action moves from Muunilinst to the familiar ruins of Yavin IV, the previous home of Sith Lord Exar Kun, and eventual base of the Rebel Alliance, Anakin defeats Ventress by tapping into the power of the dark side of the Force, by unconsciously channeling his own internal anger, bringing him ever closer to his impending fall. We also get

our first on-screen look at the planet Dantooine (mentioned but not shown in *A New Hope*) and are introduced to General Grievous, though the droid commander is drawn this time as being significantly larger, and much more dangerous (not to mention bluer) than the film version of the character.

The second volume picks up after these events, with Dooku and Grievous working to bring more systems away from the Republic and into the Confederacy. With the Republic in need of more Jedi Knights, the Jedi Council promotes Anakin to the knighthood. Over the course of three years, we see multiple events that lead up to Anakin undergoing a spiritual trial, which reveals to him a dark future and his eventual transformation to Darth Vader. Shaken by the revelation, Anakin sets out with Obi-Wan to rescue a kidnapped Chancellor Palpatine, being held by Dooku in a Separatist ship above Coruscant, and leading directly into the beginning of *Revenge of the Sith*.

I mention the spiritual trial here for two reasons. First, it gives us a glimpse into what the similar trials of a Padawan to Knight might look like – this type of psychological test is suggested in some stories, and even in the movies, but unfortunately is never fully explored. And second, it is the first time that we get a true glimpse of Anakin as he is confronted with his own anger. We see how he deals with being shown where his path is taking him, and how the suffering that he will cause is directly at odds with what he believes himself to be.

While not exactly a home run with all *Star Wars* fans, Tartakovsky's *Clone Wars* series was still very popular, earning a nomination for a Saturn Award for Best Television Presentation in Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror, in addition to winning three Emmy Awards: two for Outstanding Animated Program and one for Outstanding Individual in Animation.

The Clone Wars – Take Two

The second take at an ongoing *Star Wars* television series, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, again took place during the roughly 32-year period before the events portrayed in *A New Hope*. This time, making heavy use of 3D computer-generated imagery (CGI), the series was initially designed with a slight *anime* feel (paying tribute to the original animated *Clone Wars* series) that felt strange to some fans, but it eventually found its footing. Both the

unique style and the intense storytelling, along with rich character development, would prove to be not only well-conceived and -developed, but full of surprises even for the most hardcore *Star Wars* fan.

When the series was first announced in 2007, Lucas stated that there would be at least 100 episodes – enough for about five seasons. Each individual episode had a running time of approximately 22 minutes (in order to fill a 30-minute time slot). Lucasfilm veteran Dave Filoni was assigned to head the series as supervising director.

The Clone Wars – The Movie!

The first installment of the second *Clone Wars* series was released to theaters in August 2008 in the form of a feature-length animated film, taking place about six months after the start of the Clone Wars (the end of *Attack of the Clones*). For the movie (which combined four episodes originally intended to air on TV), Christopher Lee, Anthony Daniels, and Samuel Jackson each reprised their roles as Count Dooku, C-3PO, and Mace Windu, respectively.

As with many (if not all) spinoffs or adaptations of movies, later episodes would feature different voice actors filling the roles of the movie actors. Unlike previous adaptions of *Star Wars* (the radio play comes to mind), the show's producers seem to have taken the time to find voice actors who, for the most part, actually fit the characters, in terms of both overall voice comparison and the seemingly minor inflections and variations that not only complemented the original actors but, in many cases, surpassed them and brought their characters even more to life.

In the film and the ongoing series that followed, *The Clone Wars* featured the talents of Matt Lanter as Anakin, James Arnold Taylor as Obi-Wan, and Ashley Eckstein as new character Ahsoka Tano, alongside such veterans actors as Tom Kane (who provided the voice of both Yoda and the narrator), Stephen Stanton (Tarkin and a host of other characters), Phil LaMarr (Bail Organa), Tim Curry (Palpatine), Clancy Brown (Savage Opress), Jon Favreau, Kevin Michael Richardson, Seth Green, Katee Sackhoff, and Mark Hamill himself. Also featured were Liam Neeson, reprising his role as Qui-Gon Jinn, and David Tennant of *Doctor Who* fame.

The movie’s plot featured Obi-Wan and Anakin assigned to defend the world of Christophsis against the Separatists’ overwhelming droid army. After an extended battle, the heroes find themselves (and the population) starved for supplies as they hold off the droid army and await reinforcements. When the supplies finally arrive, they are delivered by a Jedi youngling by the name of Ahsoka Tano, who insists that Master Yoda has assigned her to Anakin as his Padawan learner.

When Ahsoka was first introduced, most fans felt that she was a pretty obnoxious character (and the whole kid-friendly “Sky-Guy” thing did not help at all), but in a welcome surprise, she would become one of the most important and best-developed characters of the entire series. While she started off as little more than an annoying child foisted upon the future Dark Lord, whom many suspected would be written off as a vehicle to help push Anakin over the line (which would have made the death of Padmé Amidala more interesting), the series took the time to grow and nurture her until she became a force to be reckoned with in her own right.

Ahsoka Tano, assigned as Anakin Skywalker's Padawan despite his protestations, later found herself in a good deal of trouble with the Jedi Council.

Despite several failed attempts to convince Obi-Wan that he is not a teacher, Anakin begrudgingly accepts Ahsoka’s apprenticeship. Certain that she is not up to the coming task and will soon return to the temple, Anakin is surprised by his new Padawan as she helps him to defeat the Separatist army, with her own “unconventional” approach to things. He tries to channel his own master and correct her behavior, but Obi-Wan is quick to

point out how similar to Anakin — in style and recklessness — Ahsoka truly is.

Once the mission has been completed, Yoda sends Anakin, Ahsoka, and Obi-Wan to find and rescue Rotta, the son of Jabba the Hutt, in an effort to improve relationships with the Hutt clans. The duo discover that Asajj Ventress is behind the kidnapping, and they rescue the infant (whom Ahsoka annoyingly nicknames “Stinky”) and travel to Tatooine to reunite the little Hutt with his father. In return for their efforts, Jabba negotiates with the Republic, allowing them to use Hutt space.

Then we meet Jabba's uncle, Ziro the Hutt. Don’t get me started on Ziro, the glow-in-the-dark tattooed Hutt with a thick Southern Droopy Dog accent…

Okay, too late. I am already started. What the hell was Lucas thinking? A lavender slug with flourescent tattoos? Oh, that is *awesome*! Now, how can we make that even better? Oh, I know, let’s give him a thick, flamboyant, overly nasal voice that sounds like a depressed 1970s cartoon character modeled after Truman Capote… and why not throw in some feathers, too? Yeah, feathers! Everyone loves feathers, right? Totally gangster.

Of course, realizing their horrible mistake, or perhaps just wanting to punish viewers even more, the producers decided to make the rest of the Hutt clan leaders all based off of cliché movie gangsters as well. We have one who resembles the Godfather, and another who is a cartoon version of Al Capone, among others. To this day, I am not sure if this was just bad process or a truly evil joke.

Wait. Jabba had a son? Oh, the EU explains that all Hutts are asexual and can change gender at will in order to reproduce. So, following this knowledge, Jabba temporarily became a female Hutt, gave birth, and returned to being a male. How is *that* for a family reunion?

The Ongoing Series

From the first episode, straight out of the gate, the ongoing series delivers one excellent episode after another. While the episodes could each stand on their own, they are also part of a larger story arc. Each arc, in turn,

is part of a larger saga, with more information revealed to viewers with each passing episode and season.

Following a single-episode story pitting Yoda against Ventress to prove to the Toydarian king that the Jedi are not warmongers, we move swiftly into the Malevolence arc, revealing a Separatist super-weapon capable of destroying any vessel instantly. While this arc clearly sets the stage for what will eventually become the Death Star prototype, with the super-laser weapon, it also pays a certain amount of homage to a story arc from Marvel Comics titled “To Take the Tarkin,” in which our heroes must destroy a similar craft.

In the second arc, Artoo is lost in battle and Anakin must find him before the Separatists can extract the secrets he carries. During his absence, a new droid is assigned to Anakin and Ahsoka nicknamed “Goldie,” whom Artoo exposes as an operative of General Grievous. As the two droids battle, Ahsoka disregards a warning from Anakin and takes on Grievous by herself, almost losing her life in the process.

This battle is one of the central turning points in the relationship between Ahsoka and Anakin. We see how desperate she is to prove to her master that she is not a child; she thinks she can defeat the droid general herself. In turn, we get to see how much Anakin has grown to accept her as not just a Padawan, but a little sister.

During the next series of stories, fans are treated to an episode called “The Bombad Jedi,” in which we find something that we would never have expected in a million years… Jar Jar Binks is actually a competent character and we are cheering for him. Yes, for the first time, Jar Jar is presented as more than merely (bad) comic relief, and becomes an interesting character. And over time, while occasionally showing a slightly clumsy side, he continues to grow and develop into someone you actually start to care about.

Yes. I said “care about” and “Jar Jar”… in the same sentence. I know, but it is true.

The next arc introduces us to the wonderful character of Hondo Ohnaka, a Weequay pirate who betrays Anakin and Obi-Wan when they try to negotiate for a captured Count Dooku, only to find that his efforts are for naught when he loses both, barely escaping with his own life. Hondo goes

on to become one of the most fascinating recurring characters in the entire series.

In addition to breathing life into an otherwise background species, Hondo brings a unique point of view that is not found in any other character – he is just a simple guy in a complicated world. He freely admits he's a pirate who would sell his own mother for credits, and makes no apologies for always trying to get the upper hand in any situation. He has a great sense of humor, a deep sense of honor (which he claims he would sell to the highest bidder, but we know better), and lastly, a comedic psuedo-French accent that keeps the viewer off-guard. When he is not trying to kill or capture the Jedi for profit, he can be found helping them out of a tight situation (for a price, of course).

A standalone episode titled "Lair of Grievous" deserves a lot of attention. Initially, this is a story about Dooku leading the Jedi to the droid general's home in an attempt to either destroy Grievous or the Jedi – or, if he is really lucky, both. What we get instead is an interesting look at the mindset of Grievous and the physical and psychological torture he puts himself through in order to be able to function inside his droid form. We get to see that he has a supply of spare parts on hand for use as needed, and how he chooses to live in isolation to avoid giving the impression of not being imposing and all-powerful.

This adventure leads directly into the next, in which the Separatists hire Doctor Nuvo Vindi, a cliché evil scientist complete with evil scientist accent, to unleash a deadly virus that was once eradicated from the galaxy after causing millions of deaths. While the central character is a bit over the top in the campy villain category, as are most villains in the series (especially where their names and accents are concerned), the arc delivers one episode that stands out in particular. "Mystery of a Thousand Moons" takes Anakin to a distant planet to find a cure, only to leave him and thousands of others trapped by a phantom force that the locals call Droll.

So naturally, you are wondering who Droll is, right? Good.

Droll is a legend, a space ghost that prevents people from leaving the planet. In reality, it is a high-tech force field system that creates a vast energy net capable of destroying any spaceship. While the Separatists are credited with installing the field, it seems that this predates them by some time (they only used it). The episode makes a point of drawing attention to

a species of “angels” that once protected the planet, as if the writers intended to explain more later, though they never did. The concept of this story is similar to that of “Deadly Reunion,” a storyline that appeared in the *Star Wars* newspaper strips.

Next up is a three-episode story arc featuring the Twi’leks, whose home world of Ryloth has been invaded by the Separatist army, driving the Twi’leks to the brink of starvation, with little or no hope of rescue. It is thus up to Anakin, Obi-Wan, and Ahsoka to hold off the advancing army until supplies and reinforcements can arrive.

This arc is filled with several sub-plots and plot holes that never get the attention they deserve. There’s a central city, for instance, that is built on the center of a chasm with an energy bridge to protect the Twi’leks. This is so out of place for a species that, according to previous stories, is quite poor and lives with constant, deadly solar-flare storms. The Twi’leks often sell their women into slavery, so the idea of their intensely protecting their children is curious.

On the good side, the episode starts to (finally) showcase the stagnation and dedication to formality that the Jedi seem to hold to, which would eventually lead to their downfall. This is made obvious with the introduction of a Twi’lek rebel leader who is at odds with the Jedi sent to help his people. Despite the Separatist occupation, Mace Windu seems more concerned with bringing the rebel leader to justice for other crimes than he is with the overall safety of the population.

During this arc, we are introduced to two new clone troopers named Waxer and Boil, who befriend Numa, a small Twi’lek child. What makes these two important to the arc is the level of humanity they bring to the war: despite being bread as soldiers and consummate professionals, they don’t seem to like the war, and showcase the difference in opinions of soldiers – one befriends the little girl and cares for her, while the other wants to leave her behind and do the job at hand (although both grow attached to her). These two clones return (and, sadly, die) in later episodes, bringing their unique character individuality and sense of humor, and were eventually made into action figures for the *Star Wars: Clone Wars* line, originally offered as a San Diego Comic-Con exclusive.

The final episode of the season brings back Ziro the Hutt and introduces us to a brand-new character named Cad Bane, a Duros male who has earned

a reputation as the most deadly and dangerous bounty hunter during the Clone Wars. Highly intelligent and resourceful, Bane (no relation to the same-named Dark Lord of the Sith who created the "Rule of Two") has worked for a number of clients, but his true loyalty is to credits and the highest bidder.

Like many bounty hunters, Cad Bane (center) has loyalty for whoever offers the most credits. But Bane is, at heart, an honorable being.

While that may sound like a typical bounty hunter, what makes Cad Bane unique, and truly one of the series' best characters, is that while he claims he is loyal to the highest bidder, he also has a sense of honor and duty, in that once he has accepted a job, he sees it through to the end, and will not sell out one client for another.

To make matters worse for the Jedi, Cad is extremely intelligent and self-confident, which gives him a distinct edge against many opponents. Cad would rather think a situation through and have several options open to him than rush in blindly. This has allowed him to escape arrest several times.

The character of Durge was originally slated to be the first bounty hunter featured in this series, but due to both the lack of interest in the character and his assumed death in the middle of a star, that was (thankfully) not possible. The introduction of Cad Bane was the shot in the arm that the series needed to break the formula character routine.

Notably, the writers were not afraid to break up the holy trinity of Anakin, Obi-Wan, and Ahsoka when it was needed. By separating them and bringing them back together, the show allowed the individual characters to grow on their own, yet still remain as the family they were, helping and learning from each other as they went. In fact, looking back at these

episodes, it seems that Ahsoka tends to learn and grow much more quickly when not working directly with Anakin, which makes her character that much more interesting.

And that's just the first season!

Season Two

Cad Bane continues to cause problems for our Jedi heroes throughout the second season, first by stealing a Jedi Holocron (a device introduced in Tom Veitch's *Dark Empire* comic book miniseries, which Jedi use to store knowledge, and which can only be accessed or activated by using the Force) and then by kidnapping potential Jedi from their parents before they can be tested.

The next five episodes return us to Geonosis, as the clone army prepares to destroy a new droid factory and uncovers a dark secret about the planet and its people that threatens to destroy the clones and the Jedi. Stealing information from a Republic senator about the new factory, our heroes encounter a new super-tank that quickly puts them on the defensive. Breaking up what seems to be another simple super-weapon episode, the story follows the Jedi as they attempt to find Separatist leader Poggle the Lesser and bring him to justice.

In so doing, the clones and Jedi encounter a zombie army of Geonosians who seem to have been re-animated by some type of parasitical worm. Barely surviving the ordeal, they flee to an abandoned hall and eventually discover the hidden secret of the Geonosian people: they share a hive-mind controlled by a massive queen-like creature. They are captured and brought to the queen, who desires to force the Jedi to accept the worms so she can control them.

The pacing of the story and its dark overtones quickly transform this from a simple combat mission into something not unlike an *Aliens*-styled adventure, with a couple of the clone troopers becoming infected with the parasites as they move from one host to the next. The parasites eventually take over the mind of a Jedi Padawan and a friend of Ahsoka, Barriss Offee, who would play a pivotal role in later seasons.

A few unique stories are mixed into the season, the first of which, "Lightsaber Lost," deals with what happens when a Jedi – in this case,

Ahsoka – loses her weapon and it falls into the wrong hands. Not only does she have to track down what happened to the stolen weapon, but she must also face her responsibility in the deaths that it caused. This episode is a strong coming-of-age tale and a turning point in Ahsoka's life as she grows from a Padawan to a more advanced student.

Next up is "Duchess of Mandalore," which introduces us to Satine Kryze, the leader of Mandalore, the world whose armor Jango and later Boba Fett wear. We learn about the Deathwatch and the violent history of a world that must now battle its own bloodlust for the better of its people.

In many stories from the Expanded Universe, even going as far back as the original Marvel Comics series, Mandalore was always described as a world of lawlessness and constant violence. *The Clone Wars* sets that violent period in the not-so-distant past, contradicting several EU stories (for instance, Dark Horse's *Tales of the Jedi* saga) by showing the planet to be a mostly peaceful world. We see a planet that is learning to accept a path of peaceful co-existence, having mostly come to terms with its own self-destructive past in which the warrior mentality was held in high regard (not unlike *Star Trek*'s Klingons). Over time, these warriors evolved from marauders to mercenaries to an organized military-for-rent service, which some fans saw as a slap in the face to the proud history of Mandalore.

Changing established history slightly, *Clone Wars* takes Mandalore from a nightmare planet to a world with a violent past, but still keeps most of the already-told stories intact by creating splinter groups such as Deathwatch, which wants to return the planet to its warrior mentality and attempts to overthrow the legitimate government to do so.

Some other episodes of note include an arc that introduces a nightmarish, prehistoric creature known as the Zillo Beast. Essentially a cross between a rancor and the Force-sensitive Night Beast from the L.A. Times newspaper strips, the creature is awakened by the force of the invasion and is soon captured and taken to Coruscant. Needless to say, this does not go well, and the beast must be destroyed, but not before it does a lot of damage. What makes this arc worth mentioning is that in the end, Palpatine secretly keeps the creature's corpse for "study," making it certain that something will be made from it. This is one of the best allusions to Palpatine's evil plans in the series, and makes me wonder if this was where the rancor creatures came from.

Another episode, “Death Trap,” brings a young and very angry Boba Fett back into the spotlight as he infiltrates a group of clones on a training mission in an attempt to exact revenge on Mace Windu for killing his father in *Attack of the Clones*. The story, which lasts for several episodes, sets the tone for Boba as he grows from an angry child to a revenge-seeking clone, to the bounty hunter he will become by the time of the original trilogy.

Season Three

The third season tends to lean a little more toward the diplomatic side, with several episodes focusing on how the war is affecting different planets caught in the middle of the conflict.

The first major arc introduces us to a group of cadets known as Domino Squad. As they prepare for their final test, we learn that the Republic, due to the ceaseless battles, has been forced to hire bounty hunters to train the clones, often with varying degrees of success. While this aspect seems a bit overlooked as a plot point, it also quietly serves to illustrate that such a prolonged war effort can take its toll on everyone, including an institution as ancient as the Jedi Order.

Having failed their examination due to a lack of teamwork, the cadets begin blaming each other and fighting within their ranks, resulting in one of them abandoning the team in the middle of the night. Refusing to accept failure, their instructor petitions Jedi Master Shaak Ti to allow the squad to repeat the test, and is granted a second chance. With the guidance of a “failed clone” named Ninety-Nine, the clones eventually see how their desire to be unique individuals had prevented them from working as a team; once they figure that out, the rest is easy and the succeed.

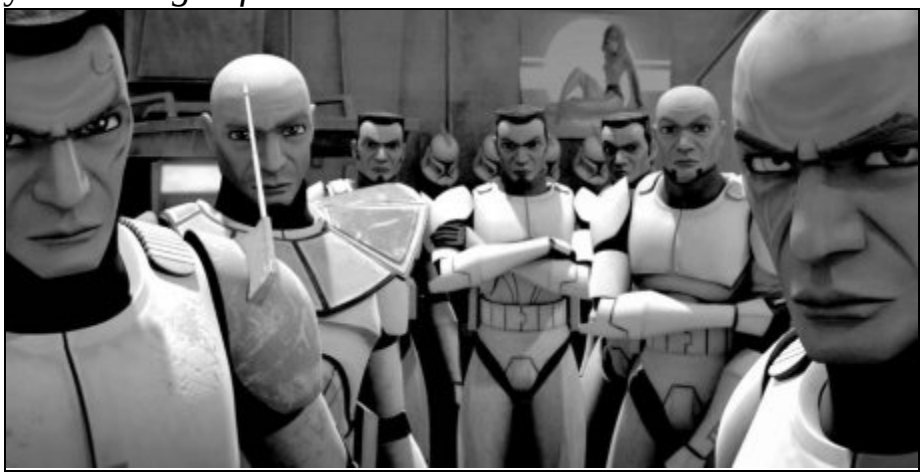
The character of Ninety-Nine is considered “failed” because he did not fully mature properly, and therefore had a number of defects. During the early cycle of the cloning process, such clones would have been destroyed before they were mature, but with the rising demand for clones, he was spared and put in a support position to free up another clone for the battlefield.

In looking back at the series so far, it is easy to see that the best episodes and character development occur when the so-called rules of storytelling are tossed right out the window. The movies relegated the clones to

background characters, whereas *The Clone Wars* brings them front and center as main characters, just as important as Anakin or Yoda. When the writers focus on the clones themselves, instead of just the Jedi, the Sith, or the Emperor, that opens up a whole new world of characters who are identical, yet are very different.

One unique aspect to the clones is that we see an increasingly larger portion of them reject the identification-standardized number system and begin to adopt regular names, such as Rex, Heavy, Fives, Droid-bait, and Cutup. As a result, we get to know the clone named “Fives,” instead of CT-5555. What makes this unique is that we see a race (for lack of a better term) who were created from a single template, and who were designed to obey orders and fight without question, reject the very military discipline they represent. Although they bear the same face, they wear different hairstyles and facial markings, and thus become distinctly recognizable from one another. They may be clones, but they are also unique individuals.

We come to accept them as more than mere soldiers, and even mourn their loss as they give everything to complete their mission and protect their companions. This aspect of the clones would continue to grow throughout the coming seasons, playing significantly into the final episodes that would tie directly to *Revenge of the Sith*.



Unlike their motion-picture counterparts, the clones seen in *The Clone Wars* are featured as prominently as the show's main characters. Note the pin-up of Padmé Amidala's handmaiden (painted by Justin Ridge) hanging in the background.

The next two story arcs set in motion several events that would change the galaxy – and not for the better. The first arc deals with the Nightsisters, a clan of Force-wielding witches from the planet Dathomir (introduced in

David Wolverton's novel *The Courtship of Princess Leia*). Darth Sidious, troubled by Ventress's growing strength in the dark side, accuses Dooku of training her as an apprentice to destroy him. When the Count denies the accusation, Sidious orders him to kill her in a demonstration of obedience.

Of course, this does not sit well with Asajj, who enlists the aid of Nightsister leader Mother Talzin to help her seek revenge. When Dooku comes to Dathomir to take a new assassin, he is presented with Savage Opress – the brother of Darth Maul, who is secretly being controlled by the Nightsisters.

The Nightsisters from *Courtship* are these witches' descendants, and have been isolated from the rest of the galaxy by Palpatine (presumably after the events of the Clone Wars). Palpatine considered them dangerous, but left them alone as he felt they may be of use some day. In the novel, they have trained rancors to be steeds and established a tribal system. In *The Clone Wars*, they are led by Talzin exclusively.

Of course, as this arc introduces a brand-new character and villain, it also suffers from that character having an even more stupid name – Savage Opress. This blatant name-as-description is over-used in the series, and is only over-shadowed by Evol Moral, later in the series. Part of me wants to believe that this was due to the "it's a cartoon for kids" thinking, and not just a lack of effort on the writers' part…[221] yet, sadly, part of me believes that if *The Clone Wars* had reached a seventh season, we would surely have met a villain by the name of… Vil'an Badee. Who knows, maybe it is part of the dark side contract that you have to adopt a silly name… after all, we already have Darth Tyranus – they should have named Savage "O'rus R'ex" and been done with it.

But I digress. Ahem.

In addition to all of this fun, there are two additional story arcs that are extremely important, not just to the series but to the overall *Star Wars* mythos. The first, referred to as the "Mortis" arc, finds Obi-Wan, Ahsoka, and Anakin trapped on a planet where the Force is perhaps the strongest. An aging father struggles to keep peace between his daughter and son, each representing one side of the Force – the light and dark side, respectively.

The father reveals that the unnamed trio are descendants of a species once known as "Force Wielders," who are neither Jedi nor Sith, but are much, much more… and so is Anakin. We learn that Force Wielders are (or

were) capable of almost total control over the Force, and predate both the Jedi and Sith by millennia. According to the Expanded Universe, these people were the first to discover a connection to the Force, and to learn to co-exist with it. Generations later, their line would split, with one branch forming the initial Jedi Order, and the Sith, in turn, eventually splitting off from that original group.

There are several important details cleverly buried in the episodes that tie directly into the movies, as well as the EU. The first is when the father reveals himself to Anakin, suggesting that he is more than Jedi or Sith, and that Anakin is as well. This connects directly with *The Phantom Menace*, when Anakin's mother reveals that "there was no father," implying Anakin was immaculately conceived by the Force, as well as with *Revenge of the Sith*, when Palpatine tells Anakin about Darth Plagueis, who was able to create life (by implication, Anakin) by manipulating the Force itself.

The other major point is when the father forces Anakin to choose which of his friends to save from his own children, in order to test the young Jedi. Ultimately, Anakin becomes fed up with what appears to be endless games, and is able to exert full control over both the light and dark sides of the Force at the same time, saving both of his companions. This would suggest that had Anakin not fallen to the dark side, he truly would have been the "Chosen One," spoken of in Jedi prophecies – the one who could bring balance to the Force.

Of course, it could also be argued that in the end, Anakin *did*, in fact, bring balance to the Force by eliminating the huge number of Jedi drawing upon the light side, ultimately weakening it. As a result, the light side would once again be balanced against the dark, with both now following the so-called Rule of Two, in order to ensure a greater power... even if the Jedi really did not choose that path.

Continuing with an already intense and hugely successful season, the show got better and better, not allowing fans any time to catch their breath. The story moves straight into the next arc, involving "The Citadel," an old Republic (now Separatist) prison designed to hold Jedi who have gone rogue. This time around, it is Master Even Piell who needs to be rescued after he is captured, carrying secret hyperspace coordinates that would give the Republic the upper hand in the war.

Several important events in this arc revolve around the surprise introduction of future Grand Moff (now Captain) Wilhuff Tarkin. Meeting him as a younger man, we can see how his form of ruthlessness would be appealing to Palpatine. Also fascinating is the interaction between Tarkin and Anakin – the biting conversations and constant pushing of the limits and frequent snapping sets the stage for how their relationship will be once Anakin becomes Vader, and the right-hand man to the Emperor. We can see this behavior of power-jockeying in *A New Hope*, some 30 years later.

Ahsoka once again surprises everyone with her appearance on the planet, having secretly traveled with the team despite being directly ordered to stay behind for her own safety. The reckless nature of her actions is not the surprising point, but rather the way in which her relationship with Anakin has slowly changed from master and Padawan to more of a father-daughter connection. When you realize just how much effort Anakin puts into caring for her and keeping her safe, it is hard to imagine his eventual fall, and yet, at the same time, we know the pain of losing her (as well as Padmé) would be enough to push him over any edge.

We also get to see the emotional side of the Jedi, as Ahsoka and the rest are forced to deal with the death of Master Piell, whose remains they place into the lava flows. Death is considered a natural-order and end-of-life/becoming-one-with-the-Force event. However, in this case, without the many masters to rely upon, and without the comforts of a clean, orderly funeral event, the Padawan must handle the situation herself, and this marks a new growth for the character, since death thus becomes more real to her on a personal level.

It should be noted that Master Piell had already been killed in an EU novel, *Coruscant Nights I: Jedi Twilight*, by Michael Reaves. When the conflict arose, the author noted his choice to kill Piell was due to Anakin being promoted to the Jedi Council by Palpatine, so he had to replace someone. There is still some debate among fans as to which is the better fate for the character, but for this writer, the show will always trump the novels, as the series is more of an “official” Lucasfilm creation, whereas the novel was written under guidance from them. (Personally, I do not think the character was important enough to put this much effort into, but I’ll leave that for readers to decide.)

The next major event is covered in the episodes “Padawan Lost” and “Wookiee Hunt,” which deal with the kidnapping of Ahsoka by Trandoshan hunters for use as sport hunt. Ahsoka must not only learn how to rely on herself and her training, but also be responsible for the protection of several younglings who have been surviving on the planet. This marks a distinct change in Ahsoka, who challenges the Trandoshan leader and eventually kills him with a powerful Force-push after channeling her anger into the attack. Once the deed is done, she starts to realize that she is following the same dark path that Anakin is walking, and begins to understand how easily anger comes and how powerful and strong it makes a Jedi. This is probably the single most important character growth moment for her.

As a bonus, we are introduced to Chewbacca and General Tarfful before their appearances in *Revenge of the Sith*.

Season Four

Not resting for a moment, the opening arc of the fourth season has our heroes representing the Republic and attempting to calm a dispute between the Mon Cal and Quarren on the water world of Mon Calamari. The Separatist army has sent their own representative, Riff Tamson, who is more interested in feeding the mistrust between the two species. We learn that Riff was the one who killed the Mon Cal king, and that he plans to take over the planet, forcing its people into a life of slavery and… well, food.

Basing the central antagonist's anatomy on that of a great white shark was a smart move on the designers’ part, as we not only get a new species, but a character who is not bound by established norms. Riff is not only the perfect predator, but the perfect villain as well. Perhaps another cinematic great white shark that once frightened innocent people in the 1970s in some way influenced Riff’s ultimate demise…

Jar Jar Binks returns to the show in this arc, first as a leader of the Gungan warriors sent to help the Mon Cal, and later playing the role of his people’s leader and helping to capture General Grievous. The writers again do the seemingly impossible and write Jar Jar as an intelligent and genuine (albeit occasionally clumsy) character, and we find ourselves rooting for him to succeed. We even, astounding as it is to say this, want to see more. With the quality of writing given to Jar Jar in *The Clone Wars*, one wonders

what type of character he could have been in the films if not written solely to serve as bad comic relief.

Well, at least *I* wonder…

The next major story arc revolves around General Pong Krell, a male Besalisk Jedi Master who is sent to replace Anakin on Umbara when the latter is recalled by the Jedi Council. Krell is recognized as something of a war hero, known for his relentless battlefield tactics, and so his clone soldiers look forward to serving with him. But having seen, in a vision, the fall of the Republic that would pave the way for the rise of the Empire, coupled with his own lust for power, Krell has embraced the dark side of the Force, while keeping his outward appearance as a Jedi Master intact.

As someone who does not accept insubordination, he refuses to consider the clones as anything but disposable soldiers, and never refers to them by their individual names – only by their CT numbers, which irritates those who have adopted names. During his service on Umbara, he intentionally devises plans that would result in a growing number of casualties among his own troops. By secretly helping the Separatists maintain control of the planet, he hopes to secure his place in the new order.

At first glance, it may be difficult to get past the species, whose only appearance in the films was as crusty diner owner Dexter Jettster in *Attack of the Clones*. Once you do, however, it opens a new vein in the *Star Wars* universe – one in which fallen Jedi are not merely victims of some tragic psychological event that caused them to turn to anger. This is a case of a well-established and respected Jedi Master who simply decides to abandon his current existence in an attempt to gather personal power. In short, this highlights how the Jedi Order has become blind to its own shortcomings, as well as the growing disillusionment among its leaders.

Captain Rex and his officers eventually uncover Krell's duplicity. Once exposed, he flees into the endless night of the planet. Despite single-handedly slaughtering many clones, he is eventually captured and restrained. Knowing that their actions would be taken as insurrection, and that the responsible clones would be destroyed, Krell continues to taunt them until a clone called Dogma, his most loyal soldier, shoots him in the back.

Aside from the Krell issue, this story also explores how clones deal with the independence of other clones. Through the various episodes, we watch

as the clones go from being disposable soldiers to individuals and even friends. In this story, we see them grapple with what it means to have free will (even if only to a limited extent). We watch as they have to deal with not only their own personal feelings, but also those of their comrades. The experienced clones must deal with the "shines" (clones whose armor is brand-new and shiny, usually worn on a clone who has not experienced combat), who have not yet adopted the free-will aspect and cling to the dogma of training. Conversely, these new, militant units must adapt to superiors who do not behave the same.

Essentially, we have clones fighting each other not just in combat, but in battles of wills, of reason, and of freedom of choices – and the responsibility those choices bring. In the end, Dogma (appropriately named) must come to terms with the fact that his training never prepared him for this situation, and he must take responsibility, knowing that in doing so, he will ultimately forfeit his own existence.

On the flip side, we watch as two of the more seasoned clones must decide to put another brother into a situation in which his actions will forfeit his life, but save others. How does one freely send a brother to his death, even if he is an unintentional traitor? Simple: give him the opportunity to put himself there.

Season four features a number of mostly independent episodes, but one story, "Bounty," stands out the most. After surviving an attack by Count Dooku, Ventress joins a group of bounty hunters that includes Bossk and Dengar, led by a pre-teen Boba Fett. The episode reveals quite a bit about Ventress's past, making her a much richer and more interesting character. In the end, she realizes that family is most important, and finds closure and the start of a new life and new hope for her future.

At first, I balked at the seeming need to include every background character from the original trilogy, but the way in which Bossk and his species have been presented and treated makes them (and him) a welcome addition. Since we do not know how Trandoshans age, it is unclear just how old he is. The one issue I do have with this is Dengar, who is depicted wearing his same outfit from *The Empire Strikes Back*. In virtually every EU source, Dengar was always human, and did not start wearing the familiar outfit until an accident in a race with Han Solo (in which Dengar tried to cheat) left him scarred and requiring multiple implants. So again,

this is something re-written for the cartoons, as Han would only be about ten years old at this point.

The final arc involves Obi-Wan faking his own death to infiltrate Cad Bane's gang and stop whatever plans they are up to – which happens to be yet another attempt on Palpatine's life. During the events of these four episodes, we get to see several minor background characters, such as the Nimbanel, who is only referred to as Jabba's accountant (and who was originally portrayed as Jabba himself in early Marvel comics), the Hammerhead (wearing the blue clothes from the classic Kenner action figure), and the Gotal from the Mos Eisley cantina. It's amazing how subtly the animators managed to slip in so many references to not only the films, but the original toys as well.

Season Five

The last major arc of season four and the first of season five both feature Savage Opress searching out and finding his brother, Darth Maul. Having somehow survived his apparent death on Naboo, Maul has lived on a garbage planet for years, having essentially gone insane from the damage and his unceasing rage. Convincing him to return to Dathomir, Mother Talzin uses the Nightsisters' magic to rebuild Maul into an even deadlier creature.

For many fans, Maul surviving being cut in half by Obi-Wan was almost beyond credible, especially considering that he fell down a seemingly bottomless shaft. He somehow kept himself alive through sheer power of will and a hatred for Kenobi, which is even more improbable and difficult to believe. And since we don't know much about the species' physiology, we won't even get into the whole *missing half a body* thing.

Accepting that this is possible for Maul's people, I suppose it makes sense that one would quickly go insane sustained only by anger and hatred. But there are still some basic questions that remain: How did he get from Naboo to the garbage planet? Who built him the original mechanical legs? What did he eat and drink to survive? How did *none* of the Jedi sense this amount of rage?

A rebuilt Darth Maul, subsisting for years entirely on rage, returns to reak havoc on the galaxy – and on Obi-Wan Kenobi.

As the new season starts, we witness the carnage that Maul and Opress begin to reign on the galaxy in an attempt to lure Obi-Wan to a duel so Maul can exact his revenge. If you were paying close attention, then you got to see a 25-year-old mistake instantly corrected, with the brief interaction of a male Snivvian dressed in a blue jumpsuit. For those unfamiliar with Kenner's infamous "blue Snaggletooth" action figure, you now have something to research and enjoy.

Also of interest in this overall story arc is our first look at the Black Sun organization, which was (or, I suppose, will become) a central focus of the *Shadows of the Empire* multimedia project. We get to see the galactic mafia and Falleen crime-lords (Prince Xizor's species) from the novel. It's admittedly a bit disappointing (but understandable) to see how fast they fold to Maul, but at the same time it also plants the seeds for how Xizor rose to power, given Black Sun's lack of leadership.

The next two arcs involve the story of Ahsoka and a group of Rebels fighting against the Separatists on the planet Onderon. Ahsoka is sent to guide their training, but not to interfere with local events. Unbeknownst to her, the son of a fallen diplomat is among the Rebels – one in whom she has a romantic interest. In addition to her Jedi duties and oaths, she must battle her natural attraction to him and jealousy of the other woman in his life.

This arc, while mostly devoid of anything interesting – the Jedi are distant, only ordering Ahsoka to behave – does have some rather large ramifications for both Ahsoka and the galaxy in general.

Master Yoda next accompanies a group of Jedi younglings to pass their tests and find crystals for use in creating their lightsabers. But as they return to Coruscant, their ship is attacked by Hondo, the Weequay pirate, who takes Ahsoka hostage instead.

While the story focuses on the Jedi younglings as they build their first lightsabers and prepare to become Padawans, it also serves to highlight some of the changes in Ahsoka, as she is now more confident and prepared to lead the younglings. It also shows how she has learned to control her fear.

After Hondo takes Ahsoka to his base to use as a negotiation with the Jedi, they are attacked by General Grievous, and it is up to Hondo and Ahsoka to make amends and work together for the sake of survival. This mutual respect is later seen when Ahsoka calls upon Hondo to deliver some goods.

The only issue I have with this arc is the use of Kaiburr crystals for the lightsabers. While it is nice to have a specific type of crystal that is needed, and even a peek at how the crystals find their owners via the Force, it serves to minimalize the importance of the Kaiburr crystal as described in the first spinoff novel, *Splinter of the Minds' Eye* (in which it is referred to as *the* Kaiburr Crystal), and its ability to enhance and magnify Force-abilities[222].

A longer-than-needed story arc follows, which revolves around R2-D2 and other droids being sent on a mission with a rather small male Zilkin named Colonel Meebur Gascon. Succeeding in their mission, they become stranded on a planet that seems to be an endless desert and time vortex. Ultimately, they find a space port that serves as a Separatist base, but the story does not explain what they were doing on the planet to start with. In an unexpected twist, they locate a clone trooper who has no memories and is working as a line cook at a local diner after being found and manipulated by the establishment's Sullustan owner. Meebur and the droids help the clone trooper regain his memory and he, in turn, helps them escape, but at the cost of his own life.

This is not one of my (or many fans') favorite arcs. Perhaps it's the dual morals of "size does not matter" and "don't judge a book by its cover" that make this more of a drawn-out story aimed at children, as opposed to an

adult audience. It doesn't advance the overall story at all, and I doubt it would have been missed had it never aired.

The season's final two arcs revolve around a plot by Deathwatch to take over Mandalore. Unbeknownst to them, their new allies – Maul and Opress – have other plans for the planet. Eventually, the plot is successful and Maul rules through the previous prime minister, only to face his former master, Darth Sidious. Savage is brutally killed by the Dark Lord, and when Maul requests to rejoin his former master, he is denied, as he has been replaced by Lord Tyranus. Seeking revenge against Sidious, Maul attacks him, only to be defeated (after Palpatine toys with him for a while). Sidious does not kill Maul, stating only that he may have use for him later…

One interesting point aspect to this arc is the division of ranks within the Deathwatch group – those who follow the leader unquestionably and those who choose what is right for the world. This illustrates how even a world founded on a warrior culture can outgrow that ideology and strive for peace.

Another notable aspect is the dedication to the Rule of Two for the Sith, and how Sidious is unwilling to break that rule (probably more out of fear for his own life than out of any respect for tradition). When he is confronted by his former apprentice, we see just how powerful Palpatine is, in the way he rather quickly dispatches Savage, and then deals with Maul. It's a small taste of things to come in subsequent stories.

Particularly enjoyable was the use of the Force-saber by the Deathwatch leader. This symbolizes a much better time for the Mandalore, and also hints at the successful combat against the Jedi.

At last, we reach the final arc of the season (and the televised series). I doubt that most fans saw it coming, and if they were like me, they were on the edge of their seats when it finally did.

When the Jedi temple hangar is blown up in a suicide-bomber style, similar to what our real world currently faces, Ahsoka is sent to investigate the damage, and she and Anakin stumble upon a plot that runs deep in the Jedi Order. When Ahsoka is summoned to take the confession of the bomber's wife, the latter is killed by a Force choke, with the cameras recording the image of Ahsoka seemingly performing the assassination.

Accused of murder by (now Admiral) Tarkin, she is expelled from the Jedi Order and placed under arrest, but escapes with the help of an unknown accomplice. Anakin and the clone army quickly hunt down

Ahsoka as she attempts to prove her innocence. Anakin hopes to protect his Padawan, while the clones are under orders to arrest or kill her for treason.

Thanks to the efforts of Padmé and Anakin, the true villain is discovered to be Barriss Offee – fellow Jedi Padawan and Ahsoka's closest friend outside of Anakin! After being defeated in a lightsaber duel by Anakin, Barriss is brought to justice, thereby clearing Ahsoka of all charges. But upon receiving news that the Jedi Council, in light of this new information, has reversed its decision and is reinstating her back into the Order, Ahsoka rejects the offer, noting that they did not believe in her when she needed them most, and that she cannot simply forget this and go on as if nothing had happened. This comes as a shock to Anakin, who is devastated when she informs him that she is leaving the Order and Coruscant.

Ahsoka has come to know and understand Anakin so well that she can sense his own thoughts about leaving the Jedi Order from time to time. When Akakin realizes how much she understands him, he cannot credibly argue for her to stay with the Jedi when he himself wants to leave (perhaps he feels trapped by the faith Obi-Wan and Qui-Gonn have put in him), so he accepts her decision, perhaps wishing he could be as strong as she is and do the same. The season closes with the powerful image of Ahsoka walking away from Anakin, the Jedi Order, and everything she has ever known.

This is perhaps the strongest moment not only for Ahsoka as a character, but for the entire series. It shows how the Jedi are so caught up in politics and public image that they are willing to offer up one of their own without hesitation. It shows how the Jedi have become so self-righteous that even when their huge mistake is placed before them for all to see, they are incapable of seeing they were wrong and assume that Ahsoka (or any other Jedi) would rush to re-join without so much as even a simple apology. This type of repeated action is not only a clear sign that the institution of the Jedi have become inept, but perhaps in some ways that they needed to be purged.

Once the shock of watching this turn of events subsided, fans began to question her survival to *A New Hope* and beyond. When Vader was ordered to hunt down and kill the Jedi – a task at which he was quite successful – did he slay Ahsoka? Could he even bring himself to do this? Or did she survive the purge? She was more a daughter to him than a student, and technically no longer a Jedi, having never reached the level of Jedi Knight.

This sparked a healthy amount of discussion among viewers, who hoped that we might one day meet up with her again. And, as it turns out, we would.[223]

The Lost Missions

The success of *The Clone Wars* demanded a sixth season, but unfortunately, forces behind the scenes would not allow that to happen, and the show was prematurely canceled. While there has been no real attempt to explain this beyond the lame “We told the story we wanted” excuse, the generally accepted opinion is that the show was increasingly expensive to produce, leading to its eventual cancelation. Thankfully, in 2014, online content provider Netflix made an exclusive agreement with Lucasfilm to produce and distribute the 13 (mostly) completed episodes. Genius.

I say “genius” because this not only brought an important segment of the story to the fans, but also showed that there was still a vast amount of life left in the series. In addition, this cemented Netflix as a legitimate player in the original content-distribution arena.

In so doing, the companies made sure that the work already completed did not go to waste. What's more, in an off-hand way, they ensured that the series ended on a truly epic note, with a couple of story arcs that would have ripples all the way through the *Star Wars* cinematic universe, and even the Expanded Universe as well.

The first arc revolved around the mysterious Order 66 and the clone troopers who were unknowingly pre-programmed to turn against their Jedi leaders. When clone trooper Tup suffers a breakdown and intentionally kills a Jedi Master, he becomes the center of attention for the Kaminoans, as well as Sidious and Dooku, who rush to keep their secret plans from being discovered.

The Kaminoans want to terminate Tup so they can investigate why he reacted the way he did, despite knowing full well what happened. ARC Trooper Fives steps in and tries to defend his fellow trooper from what is little more than a lab experiment.

When Tup eventually dies, Fives, with the assistance of a medial droid, discovers the DNA trigger that caused the breakdown. He attempts to bring this to the attention of the cloners, who move to hide such knowledge and

protect their interests, as well as to Jedi Master Shaak Ti, who dismisses Five's pleas as being nothing more than a side effect and stress of combat… again spotlighting the conceit of the Jedi.

Ultimately, the reason for the breakdown is revealed as being a genetic code to trigger Order 66, which had malfunctioned and became active too soon. When the proof is discovered, an effort is made to deliver the proof to the Jedi and Palpatine, but Fives is killed and the chancellor "loses" the evidence. This story arc brings to light how Order 66 was so successful, as the clones did not truly turn against the Jedi, but rather were pre-programmed to see them as the enemy once a specific command was issued. Left untouched is how many clones this early activation affected, as well as how many for which it simply did not work. Were the latter either killed for disobeying orders, or did they flee for safety elsewhere?

Some Expanded Universe tales have noted that the Emperor, after the full establishment of the Galactic Empire, halted the cloning project and started to recruit soldiers from Outer Rim worlds. With this program in place, the numbers swelled but overall efficiency declined, as most lacked the required skills, much less the dedication. The early EU works by Tim Zhan and Dark Horse Comics suggest that Palpatine co-opted the cloning process for his own use – a ready and limitless supply of his own clones, ensuring a form of immortality. The only cost was that each clone used lasted a shorter time than its predecessor.

The next arc reveals how the Separatists manipulated the Banking Clan, stealing their (and, by extension, the other worlds') wealth for their own needs, and hiding it under false payments and charges. This sets the scene for the Empire's foundation from a financial aspect, but also triggers the overall loss of faith in central forms of government, making it easier for Palpatine and his new order to seize control.

The last, and perhaps most significant arc of the *Lost Missions* – and, frankly, of the entire series – revolves around Yoda, who hears the voice of his former student, Qui-Gon Jinn, while meditating. Attributing this to stress, Yoda ignores it as nothing but his imagination. When the voice returns again and again, he seeks medical treatment, but to no avail.

Qui-Gon directs Yoda to travel to the center of the galaxy to learn the secrets of the Force that Jedi Knights of old once knew, including how to survive death itself. When Yoda arrives, he is greeted and guided by what

may very well be the essence of the Force itself, or perhaps the remains of the original, ancient midi-chlorians.

This serves to explain how Qui-Gon was able to project himself to Obi-Wan and Anakin, but also re-writes the belief that Jedi masters can become one with the Force and return as spirits (à la the end of *Return of the Jedi*). Dark Horse's *Tales of the Jedi* had previously suggested that only some masters gained the ability to do so, while most did not.

Yoda is faced with a series of trials that he must successfully complete, or perish in the attempt. Ultimately, he succeeds, with the last trial bringing him face to face with the specter of his own emotions, buried and forgotten for hundreds of years. In a battle against himself that would make even Gollum proud,[224] he learns how to defeat the hate, anger, and fear that he had buried to become a Jedi.

Thus, we see how Yoda is transformed from the ancient Jedi Master of the prequels into the more humble and wise Jedi first seen on Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*. What is most intriguing about this is that for Yoda to truly become the powerful Jedi Master he was, he had to do more than simply control his emotions – he had to eliminate the negative ones altogether.

The very last episode brings Yoda to the home world of the Sith, where he must pass his final test, and where he encounters a vision foretelling all that is to come: the fall of Anakin, the rise of Sidious/Palpatine and the Empire, the destruction of the Jedi, and more. When he is unsuccessful at saving Anakin, he makes Palpatine aware that he now knows of his plans, and realizes that regardless of what the outcome of the Clone Wars may be, there will one day be a new hope.

It is natural for viewers to thus assume that Yoda now had this information and simply did nothing to prevent the events that he had foreseen in the vision. With the imminent destruction of the Jedi at hand, one would think that scream it from the roofs he would. But I would like to offer another point of view for why this did not happen…

Having the future events revealed to him via this vision, Yoda does realize that the end of the Jedi Order and the rise of the Sith Empire are imminent. Being a wise Jedi, he does not tell anyone of this, because only days earlier, the Jedi Order –which he served for some 800 years – pretty

much locked him away for being on the verge of a breakdown, just for saying he was hearing voices of his previous student who had perished.

Imagine what they would have done had he tried make this information known… Some masters in the Jedi Order would likely have jumped at the chance to eliminate Yoda and take his place on the council. Yoda would have been locked up and forgotten about, left to die during the purge, never having the opportunity to guide and train Luke, as the twins would be under the control of Palpatine, if not destroyed before their birth. In this sense, Yoda weighed the options and chose to allow the Jedi's destruction in order to eventually save the galaxy. Had he not done this, Obi-Wan would have been killed, Luke and Leia would never have been born, and the events of the original trilogy would have been erased.

The Clone Wars Legacy

Bringing the series' final season to a close are two last story arcs, each consisting of four episodes. These eight chapters were written and produced, and the animation was started to the point of creating animated storyboards. However, it was never fully finished, despite several online fan petitions to encourage the episodes' eventual completion.

Instead of letting all of this work disappear into the unknown, never to be seen again, Lucasfilm took the unusual (at least, for a studio) position that the fans deserved to see them, even if they were not polished. To this end, we were given *The Clone Wars Legacy*, a special section of starwars.com that hosted these episodes for fans to watch if they so desired.

And, naturally, they desired.

All eight of these storyboard-style episodes were made available, grouped as two unique story arcs. And they provide a fitting ending and tribute to a phenomenal series.

The first arc consists of four episodes making up "Crystal Crisis on Utapau," while the second four form a story titled "The Bad Batch" (originally conceived as the opening storyline for a planned seventh season). These episodes, while unfinished, provide some unique aspects that help fill in bits and pieces of the overall *Star Wars* universe.

"Crystal Crisis on Utapau" was released online in September 2014. Having been sent to the sinkhole world of Utapau to retrieve the body of a

dead Jedi Master, Anakin and Obi-Wan soon realize they have stumbled upon a murder and cover-up – something so big that it cost that Jedi Master her life. What really stands out is that this is the only arc in which Anakin tries to deal with Ahsoka's decision to leave the Order.

I had hoped that this would have been left alone with the Padawan walking away from the Jedi. However, this story revisits that event, as Anakin, in need of assistance, informs Obi-Wan that he will contact Ahsoka and have her… Oh, yeah, there *is* no Ahsoka to call upon anymore. While some might say it is good for Anakin to deal with his loss openly, his natural sadness turns to anger uncharacteristic even for him. He huffs and puffs and practically demands that she be returned to the Order – the total opposite of the father figure who understood her just a few episodes prior, and who had to come to grips with his own desire to leave.

I suppose that this was written to set up the future Dark Lord's rampage against the Jedi, and to make it easier for him to deal with her leaving and (in his mind) betraying him. Unfortunately, the entire scene, with the exception of his initially forgetting she's gone, feels far too forced, and not in tune with how Anakin's character has grown throughout the years. Instead of regret and perhaps a sense of failure to protect her, he makes the empty claim that *she* betrayed *him* by not accepting the Jedi Council's non-apology for throwing her to the wolves. Hmmmph. His reaction is a total one-eighty from the last time we saw them together.

No, this is not the Anakin we have come to know. For this type of anger to be real, it has to be more than a throwaway scene. It has to have feeling, representing some remorse on his part. Even Kenobi cannot pull his head out of the Council's back door long enough to offer more than some "Well, there was blame on both sides" bullshit line – clearly, even Obi-Wan knows the Council turned their collective backs on Ahsoka, whom they should have protected (in fact, they were sworn to do so), and chose political process over loyalty and trust. None of this scene fits either character at all.

The only good part of it is that it perhaps shows that Kenobi knows he was just as guilty as the rest of the Council in failing Ahsoka. This becomes just the first of many failures for the noble knight.

The remainder of the arc deals with Grievous (or, rather, his henchmen) making a deal with a race of weapon smugglers to deliver a massive Kaiburr crystal (the same type of crystal used in a lightsaber, only

thousands of times larger). This huge crystal, Yoda explains, is the heart of a horrible weapon from ages long forgotten – something from a children's fairy tale (which, incidentally, brings up the fact that the *Star Wars* universe must have some truly messed-up children's stories, if they deal with murder, super-weapons, and rancor beasts gone wild).

But I digress.

One thing I find disappointing about this arc is how quickly the murder of the Jedi Master they were sent to investigate is forgotten in lieu of the greater gain from possessing the super-crystal. We watch as Anakin becomes angrier and Kenobi more conceited, as well as how the Jedi Council does absolutely *nothing* to assist them, despite how important this crystal is said to be. I guess the Jedi Masters don't want their seats to get cold or something.

This storyline revisits the Pau'ans, first shown in *Revenge of the Sith* (when Tion Medon told Kenobi about the Separatists' base on their home world of Utapau). However, it fails to explain how Obi-Wan would have forgotten the Separatists being there in the movie. If he did, in fact, remember this, then the writers missed an opportunity to plant that seed, so to speak.

Still, this episode showcases the Amani (the species of Amanaman, from *Return of the Jedi*), and their unique lifestyle. We get to see another otherwise one-dimensional background character brought to life in a unique society. So kudos for that one.

In the end, the Jedi prevail and Grievous fails (as he always does), etc., etc. While initially hesitant to even bother with these episodes, I watched them in order and found it amazingly easy to overlook the storyboard animation look and feel (the lack of real movement or lip-synching, and the bodies being cylinders) and was able to enjoy them as part of the series.

"Bad Batch," screened in story reel form at Celebration Anaheim in April 2015, introduces us to Experimental Unit: Clone Force 99, a group of irregular clones who each have a "desirable mutation" or unique specialty – think of them as the A-Team of clone troopers.

I was admittedly skeptical about this one, fearing it would be about yet another group of super-human (or, at least, super-clone) warriors who refused to obey orders, yadda, yadda, yadda. But I was pleasantly surprised,

and while there are a couple of face-palm-worthy moments, I found myself wanting to know more about them and see them in action again.

But, alas, this would not be.

Named in honor of Ninety-Nine, the irregular clone who helped defend the Kamino cloning facility against a Separatist attack, Clone Force 99 appears to be a side project of Commander Cody, and while they report to him, they also seem to fall outside of the regular chain of command. Respecting the heritage, but not fond of the name, they have taken to calling themselves "the Bad Batch," in reference to their not being successful (good) clones.

Oh, and despite being clones, they look nothing alike, and nothing like the other standard clones we are all used to seeing. So there is that.

The group consists of Hunter, a Charlie Sheen-esque Rambo-like character (think Topper Harley from *Hot Shots!*), complete with face paint and red headband; Tech, a computer-savvy hacker who can crack anything in a few seconds; Crosshair, an older, wiser sharp-shooter who never misses; and, bringing up the rear, B.A. Baracus… er, I mean, Wrecker, a massive clone who loves to destroy things, especially droids. Oh, and he is deathly afraid of heights.

Living in and flying a spaceship that is a cross between a Lambda-class shuttle and a Klingon Bird-of-Prey, the group never seems to have a problem finding trouble. The ship itself is actually a unique design, and I would love to have seen more of it, but what pushes it over the edge (in an awesome way) is the nose-art featuring a certain scantily clad senator from Naboo, who serves as the team's pin-up girl, much to Anakin's displeasure, especially when Wrecker tells him, "She can negotiate with *me* anytime…"

With the clones suffering heavy losses at every turn, Captain Rex suggests that the Separatists have acquired an algorithm of his that predicts clone behavior, possibly from Echo (who was thought to have been killed while escaping the Citadel), and they decide to prove his theory. What Rex does not count on is finding an encoded transmission from CT-1409 – otherwise known as Arc Trooper Echo. Unsure whether this is real or a trap, the group sets out to uncover the answers.

Arriving on Skako-Minor, the home world of the Techo Union, they find the source of the transmission, as well as a cyborg version of Echo, now under the control of Wat Tambor. Rescuing their comrade, the team

barely escapes, only to face a greater force attacking the Republic shipyards. Volunteering to assist, despite his weakened condition, Echo helps the Jedi and Republic by sending false battle plans and deactivating the battle droids before they can overrun the Jedi and clones.

Aside from the central characters, we are only briefly introduced to the native inhabitants of Skako-Minor, who seem to be a primitive people who worship a flying creature, but not one of the spaghetti-monster family. On the one hand, it is intriguing to see the native culture who still inhabit a world taken over by a superior force (at least, in terms of firepower); however, I wish these characters could have been fleshed out to be more than background players of little or no intelligence. One would think that after so many years, they would not remain a backward, isolated group.

Also unveiled is a new battle droid variation serving the Techno Union. These new droids are similar to the original ones, except with a split head and an extra set of arms that convert to wings. Yep, they can fly. And they look really stupid.

Now, let me nitpick just a little bit here, since this is the last opportunity to do so.

First, I have never been a huge fan of what I call “alien of the week” voices in *Clone Wars*. Everyone seems to be just short of a racist joke, or at least a minor sexual innuendo. That being said, this is the first time that painful voice style has applied to what is essentially a major character: Wrecker.

While I came to like the character overall, the fact that his voice is a combination of drunken Scot, Aussie, and pretty much any wrestler from the early 1980s grows tedious rather quickly, especially when coupled with his constant whining about wanting to destroy things. It almost seems like this character had to fight past a blatant attempt to keep him one-dimensional in order to become interesting. Thankfully, he succeeds… at least, a little.

The only other negative aspect is that the characters never seem to make a mistake. Ever. These are *failed* clones who were modified to fit specific needs, but they seem almost MacGyver-ish in their tactics, always having the right tools, the right skills, and the right over-the-top talents. I mean, if you have a clone who can ricochet a single shot down a hallway and take

out an entire platoon of battle droids, why not just clone *these* guys and call it a day?

Did I mention face-palm moments? Yes, I did. And there are several. A big one (which is not just a face palm, but more on the scale of a face slap) is when Rex, Cody, and Anakin start to form a mission plan, and Kenobi whines to Anakin that he asked the Council for permission and was denied, yet they are going to do it anyway. What, perhaps, should have been a warning to not expect any support instead becomes something of an "I am going to tattletale on you" situation, followed by Jedi pouting of epic proportions. Much like in the previous arc, Obi-wan seems to have lost his ability to think independently and must rely on direction at every turn.

The next big rash on an otherwise good story involves another Jedi, this time the ever-perfect Mace Windu. Picture the characters rappelling into a hot battle zone, surrounded by what could be hundreds, if not thousands, of battle droids. The Jedi are on the defensive, crouched in preparation for the coming battle. What would Mace do, you ask? Why, he would stop and instruct the battle droids (preprogramed machines, mind you) to consider their roles, and to shut themselves down and allow themselves to be reprogrammed to serve a greater good…

Yes, that is what he does. Sigh.

Thankfully, the lead droid's only response is to shout "Blast them!" It's what I would have done if I were a clone trooper. And then blasted him again. And again…

In some ways, it is good that the Clone Wars were coming to an end, and that the Jedi Order were about to be wiped out. Any more of this type of nonsense, and I would have started cheering for Palpatine and Dooku myself.

I truly wish that *The Clone Wars* as a series – and, in fact, the prequel movies themselves – had kept Mace Windu as he was in the original animated shorts from Genndy Tartakovsky: a kick-ass Jedi who did not take crap from anyone. Instead we have… this.

Double sigh.

If there's one shining moment that would redeem any negative parts of these final two story arcs, it's the introductory text for the first episode of "Bad Batch," which reads: "The battles are over, but the heroes live on. Thank you, *Clone Wars* fans." It's a nice acknowledgment of all the viewers

who made the series a success and kept it going for so many years. And we still want more.[225]

Final Thoughts

During the events of the original film trilogy, there were many questions that needed to be answered, but all the prequel movies did was to add more questions about what led to the (then) current state of the galaxy. With the introduction of *The Clone Wars*, fans experience a narrative from a perspective of those who are actually soldiers on the ground. We see the daily battles and events that led up to the movies, and now better understand that the Clone Wars were the battle for the Republic, fought with a race of soldier-slaves.

As a result, we come to see the Jedi Order in a new light, one that casts the Order as an organization that had outlived its usefulness and traded its values for its policies, becoming merely a shadow of the once-magnificent Jedi of legend. Knights who were once the defenders of truth and justice were now street cops and politicians. Corruption opened doors, and ultimately ushered in the end of the Republic itself.

While we still do not know the specific fate of all the remaining clones, the EU has drawn lines for how the highly skilled clone troopers become the inept stormtroopers. Some authors have written stories about surviving clones in hiding or stranded on various worlds, never knowing about Order 66, much less the destruction of the Republic and the rise and fall of the Empire.

Thanks to *The Clone Wars*, fans have learned about the backgrounds of some characters from *A New Hope*'s cantina scene, as well as how Obi-Wan was able to guide Luke from beyond the physical plane. We also got to see how Palpatine could take control of the Republic with the Jedi's unwitting assistance, and how they were so easily dispatched to ensure that they posed no challenge to his plans.

In short, the events that make up the Clone Wars are probably more important to the *Star Wars* saga than all three prequels combined. They take the mythos and half-truths presented in the original trilogy and bring them out into the light for examination.

While the series enjoyed five-plus seasons and more than 100 episodes, my regret is that it did not last longer, nor did it tell all of the tales that needed to be told. We can only hope that the creators of *Star Wars: Rebels* will learn from the mistakes and successes of *The Clone Wars*, and continue to tell amazing stories that will entertain children and adults alike.

Vanguard of a New Continuity: Season One of *Rebels*

by Nathan P. Butler

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. And *Star Wars: Rebels* was destined to premiere right in the middle of it all.

Lucasfilm Animation's *Rebels* has now aired its first season amid an era of drastic changes in *Star Wars* as fans knew it. That context of change, however, requires that *Rebels* be examined not just on its own merits as an entry in the *Star Wars* saga, but also in terms of its place in the grand scheme of these changes. In light of the asteroid field of pitfalls and criticism that the series faced at launch, did *Rebels* prove itself a *Millennium Falcon*, deftly navigating its way to success, or did the first season take a TIE fighter-inspired header into an obstacle (perhaps a potato among the asteroids) and fail to thrive?

Chronological Context: Real-World Changes

Any broad analysis of *Rebels* requires chronological context to clearly distinguish the challenges it has faced in being accepted by the fans. Disney announced its purchase of Lucasfilm and plans for new films in October 2012, and the deal was finally completed that December. Just three months later, fans learned that *The Clone Wars*, which had been airing on Cartoon Network since 2008, was being canceled prematurely in favor of a mysterious new animated series. The first specific information about the new series, including its title of *Star Wars: Rebels*, was revealed shortly thereafter, in May 2013.

Just short of one year later, April 2014 brought the saga-shaking (some would say “saga-shattering”) announcement that the previously existing *Star Wars* continuity that had been considered the official continuation of the saga since 1991 was being rechristened “Legends” and supplanted by new materials that would build a canonical saga in which all new tales were equal in status to the *Star Wars* films. This new continuity would be guided by the newly formed Lucasfilm Story Group.

Rebels would be the first new television series to join the live-action films and *The Clone Wars* at the heart of this burgeoning continuity. The first season was to include 16 episodes. Along the way, one of those 16 was instead broken into four “shorts” so the series could be previewed online (from August to September 2014). Two of the 16 were then combined into the hour-long “Spark of Rebellion” premiere episode, which made its television debut in October 2014. This was followed, later that month, by the first of 13 regular episodes that comprised the remainder of *Rebels*' first season which aired on Disney XD through March 2015[226].

The span of years from 2012 to 2015 was thus the best of times for the saga, bringing with it the promise of new films, a “true” canon in which everything new would count equally, and more. For fans of *The Clone Wars* and the original continuity born of the Expanded Universe (EU), however, it was the era in which major portions of “their” *Star Wars* were brought to screeching halts – the worst of times for those elements of the saga.

Rebels spent its first season in the heart of this maelstrom of change.

Leading the Way: *Rebels* in Relation to the Canon Announcement

From 1991 through early 2014, the novels, comics, and other tales of the *Star Wars* EU formed a broad saga that lived up to its name, expanding the universe of *Star Wars* beyond the films that started it all. The continuity came to retroactively also include materials produced in the early days of the franchise, going all the way back to the 1976 novelization of the original film, ghost-written by Alan Dean Foster. It was a massive continuity that spanned nearly four decades of real-world publications and many thousands of years of in-universe events.

The April 2014 announcement that this enormous version of the saga would be relegated to Legends status in favor of something new was a body blow, sometimes a death blow, to the fandom of many longtime readers of that version of *Star Wars*. That unified universe of numerous licensed works had been a rare experiment in science fiction spinoffs. Some fans were shocked, while others celebrated. It was a key yet controversial moment in the *Star Wars* saga's evolution.

To say that the announcement itself was the start of continuity concerns, however, would be to ignore earlier ripples of angst that were simply overshadowed. The 2012 announcement of *The Force Awakens* had already raised concerns about the future of what was then the "official" post-*Return of the Jedi* continuity, as fans expected stories in that era (now Legends material) to be stricken from the saga in favor of Disney's new films. Moreover, *Star Wars* cartoons now had a track record, thanks to *The Clone Wars*, of altering continuity at will based on the desires of George Lucas, constantly leaving individuals like Leland Chee (then the Keeper of Lucasfilm's Holocron Continuity Database and now a member of the Story Group) scrambling to "retcon[227]" the saga to make way for new "truth." (More on this in a moment.)

The potential for a new cartoon series to again impose itself onto continuity over what had come before was a concern for *Rebels* from the start. If anything, the downgrading of the earlier official saga into Legends and the creation of the Story Group's "canon" saga lessened those concerns. Unfortunately for the series, however, it made its debut prior to *The Force Awakens*, which has, in many cases, made it a primary focus of ire for fans who remain incensed about the "loss" of Legends materials from the "true" *Star Wars* saga.

Doing It Better: Learning from *The Clone Wars*

At the time that *The Clone Wars* premiered in 2008, there had already been a trio of prior *Star Wars* cartoon series, though with only marginal involvement from Lucas himself. Nelvana's *Droids* and *Ewoks* had aired on ABC from 1985 to 1986, while director Genndy Tartakovsky's short *Clone Wars* (sans "The," and often dubbed the *Clone Wars* micro-series) had provided a lead-in to *Revenge of the Sith* on Cartoon Network, from 2003 to

2005. Lucasfilm's in-house Lucasfilm Animation, however, was a new venture, and *The Clone Wars* would be its first project.

Throughout the course of a theatrical film (2008), five seasons on Cartoon Network (2008 to 2013), and the remnants of a sixth season that found refuge on Netflix in 2014, *The Clone Wars* chronicled a large portion of the three-year era of conflict between *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. Its greatest battles, though, were not the ones on the screen, but rather those found in the challenge of producing a new show and building an audience in the hyper-critical age of internet *Star Wars* fandom.

Out of the gate, *The Clone Wars* faced resistance from some segments of the saga's fan base, regarding its attempt to rewrite the history of the Clone Wars, a conflict that had already been chronicled in great detail (often with stories set on a detailed week-by-week, month-by-month multimedia calendar) in novels by Del Rey, comics and graphic novels by Dark Horse Comics, and video games by LucasArts and other licensees. Fans who viewed the Clone Wars through the Expanded Universe were drawn to Quinlan Vos *before* the television series stripped away all but the surface level of his character, the darker adventures of the era (such as Asajj Ventress capturing and torturing Obi-Wan), a General Grievous who was a true menace instead of a "mustache-twirling villain" defeated *ad nauseum*, and the growth of Anakin Skywalker as a Padawan throughout almost the entirety of the struggle before he finally became a Jedi Knight a mere six months before *Revenge of the Sith*.

All of that was now out the window, or at least in jeopardy, as *The Clone Wars* made Anakin a knight in the early days of the conflict, familiar characters like Vos and Greedo were brought into the series as supposedly exciting cameos that instead produced rage due to their continuity-demolishing use, and the saga as it had existed had to make way for a Padawan for Anakin who had never existed before 2008. The result was a continuity train wreck of epic proportions and assurances from the powers that be, via Leland Chee, that there would someday be a reconciliation to explain how the older materials and this new series were meant to fit together. That reconciliation never came, apparently abandoned once the Legends announcement of April 2014 was made.

Part of this mess came about because George Lucas was directly involved, and policy had existed for years that his vision took precedence.

Lucas, for his part, paid little attention to the licensed materials that he had, for decades, allowed Lucasfilm to perpetuate as an official continuation of his saga. To Lucas, it was a "parallel universe"[228] to be drawn upon from time to time for inspiration, as in the case of Aayla Secura in *Attack of the Clones* or the addition of Nightsisters and Holocrons to *The Clone Wars*, but nothing to which he was obligated to adhere. (This is essentially the same concept that later dubbed that continuity as Legends, allowing new canonical writers to draw elements from it as they saw fit.) This approach virtually guaranteed clashes with existing materials, but on a more basic level, one could argue that such clashes would have been inevitable even without Lucas's involvement, because the stories were to follow characters (Anakin, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Grievous, Count Dooku, *et al.*) who already existed in this jam-packed era of stories in print.

That roster of familiar characters would also limit the storytelling possibilities, since fans already knew the fates of these characters, leaving little development for *The Clone Wars* to explore. (It would instead focus almost all development on Ahsoka Tano.) Even throwaway lines in the films restricted the series. Anakin's comment in *Revenge of the Sith* about Grievous being shorter than expected, coupled with Grievous's comment about Anakin's age, created the impression that the two had never met. Thus, a rule was created for *The Clone Wars* that the two characters could never meet in the series. (Oddly, while that exchange kept Anakin from meeting Grievous, his comment to Dooku that his "powers have doubled since [he] last met" the count – an obvious reference back to *Attack of the Clones* three years earlier in *Star Wars* time – did not receive such attention, and the two faced off in so many duels during the series that the joke in fandom became "My powers have doubled since last week, Count.")

The Clone Wars also often seemed to struggle for its identity. Sometimes, it was a show directed at children with goofy side stories and slapstick antics (usually when Jar Jar Binks appeared). Other times, it was deadly serious and as dark as *Revenge of the Sith*, particularly when exploring the humanity of the clones. The series also swung between single-episode stories like "Trespass," arcs formed by somewhat self-contained tales (such as the Ryloth episodes), and full-blown four-episode arcs (Pong Krell, Order 66, Ahsoka's final arc) that felt like mini-movies. Its episodes, until "Nightsisters," often aired far out of chronological order.

Some episodes even required webcomics to make sense. (The primary example of this is the end of "Dooku Captured," wherein Anakin and Obi-Wan avoid being knocked out and taken prisoner, which then transitions directly into the opening of "The Gungan General," in which they *have* been knocked out and taken prisoner. Only the webcomic "Switch" made a kind of head-shaking sense out of the arc.)

In short, then, *The Clone Wars* suffered from the use of existing characters, clashing with existing continuity, and an inconsistent storytelling structure. Could *Rebels* learn from the pitfalls of its predecessor? The answer thus far would seem to be "yes."

While opinions in fandom vary greatly on whether the abandonment of the Legends saga in favor of a new canon crafted more carefully by the Story Group is a good thing for *Star Wars*, it has had a freeing effect on *Rebels*. Its portrayal of the development of the Rebellion can be crafted without the need to consider *The Force Unleashed*. Its use of Lando Calrissian need not require in-depth research into the character's Legends backstory, such as in the contemporary *Han Solo Trilogy*. The series exists within what is currently a fairly small library of in-universe, canon materials, giving the creators unprecedented freedom to create what they wish (like Lucas with *The Clone Wars*) without constantly lobbing high explosives into existing tales (very much *unlike* Lucas with *The Clone Wars*). If the Story Group is to be believed, they will be guiding continuity in such a way that clashes between sources will be kept at a bare minimum, due to careful planning ahead of time and the knowledge that all sources (television, films, novels, comics, etc.) are considered "true" and taken into consideration by this new collective "Lucas."

Even were that not the case, though, *Rebels* breaks away from *The Clone Wars*' mold by focusing on new characters on a new planet. Supporting players have appeared that previously existed in *The Clone Wars* or the films, but the core group of protagonists and most of the antagonists, at least in the first season, were created specifically for *Rebels*. They simply have no prior incarnations with which to clash. The closest thing the crew of the *Ghost* have to Anakin's "my powers have doubled" line is Yoda's assertion to Luke, in *Return of the Jedi*, that "when gone am I, the last of the Jedi will you be." One has to wonder whether, given that

Yoda knows of Kanan and Ezra as of “Path of the Jedi,” this might spell eventual doom for *Rebels*’ Jedi duo.

Perhaps the most significant change in *Rebels* relative to *The Clone Wars* has been in its story structure. No longer are tales told out of order, in small self-contained arcs, or in a mixture of tales that matter and those that are utterly devoid of broader purpose. In the first season of *Rebels*, virtually every episode mattered in the grand scheme of the season, acting as a single chapter in an ongoing story. This cohesive structure included every episode from “Spark of Rebellion” through “Fire Across the Galaxy,” with the exception of “Idiot’s Array.” Even one of the pre-season shorts, “Art Attack,” received references in the season finale. It is thus fitting that iTunes customers who purchased a season pass for *Rebels* for the 2014–2015 season did not purchase *Rebels, Season 1*, but, according to iTunes, *Rebels, Volume 1*. The season was a single volume, comprising episodes as chapters of that whole.

Structurally and in terms of continuity, then, *Rebels* is already on more solid footing than Lucasfilm Animation’s previous *Star Wars* efforts.

The crew of the Rebel ship *Ghost*. Left to right: Hera Syndulla, Kanan Jarrus, Ezra Bridger, Garazeb Orrelios, and Sabine Wren, with C1-10P in front.

The Character of the Characters: Developing New Heroes and Villains

One of the aforementioned strengths (and early criticisms) of *Rebels* is in its primary cast of characters, none of whom (with the possible exception

of Wilhuff Tarkin, if he can be counted among the primary cast late in the season) existed before the series entered production. The crew of the *Ghost* and their Imperial adversaries were all free of prior continuity even before the abandonment of the Legends saga.

This put the responsibility on the creative team at Lucasfilm Animation to develop these characters almost entirely on screen. The first season would succeed or fail with these characters. The results are a mixture of great success with some characters and what might be an intentional decision not to develop others beyond their surface level in this first season.

The crew of the *Ghost* received the most attention, as would be expected. Kanan Jarrus, touted as the "cowboy Jedi" in promotional materials, was given an abundance of character development, from his choice to "let everyone in on the secret" by revealing himself as a Jedi in "Spark of Rebellion" to his self-doubt and need to overcome it that created a through line for the character across many of the episodes, to hints of his past and the death of Jedi Master Depa Billaba in "Fire Across the Galaxy." Moreover, Kanan received a great deal more character development as a former Jedi in hiding in the first of the Story Group's canon novels, John Jackson Miller's *A New Dawn*, released one month before the season premiered. As such, for readers of the novel – which, under the Story Group's new policy, is equal in stature to the cartoons and films – Kanan's revelation in the premiere carries even greater weight.

Shortly after the season finale, Marvel Comics began its fourth series since reclaiming the licensing rights to *Star Wars* comic books, *Kanan: The Last Padawan*, an exploration of Kanan's journey from Order 66 into the years preceding *A New Dawn* and *Rebels*. His is currently, by far, the most developed backstory among the core cast, and Kanan is the only series regular, aside from Tarkin, to receive major tales in other media focusing on his previous exploits.

Alongside Kanan, in terms of character development, is the series' viewpoint character, Ezra Bridger. Explored to a lesser extent in other media (*Rebel Journal by Ezra Bridger* and *Ezra's Gamble*, for instance), Ezra's development has mostly come on screen as he progressed from a character driven by somewhat selfish motives, born of living on his own for seven years on the streets of Lothal as of "Spark of Rebellion," to becoming part of the *Ghost* "family" and a Jedi Padawan. While the obvious track of

Ezra's development is his Jedi path (his potential discovered in "Spark of Rebellion," a dip toward the dark side in "Gathering Forces," a Jedi test of sorts in "Path of the Jedi," and so on), it is Ezra's emotional storyline that has provided the most human elements for this character that some fans have derided as "Aladdin in Space" and the most "Disneyfied" of the core cast. The defensive, self-centered nature of the character comes to be recognized by the audience as a fear of allowing himself to become attached to anyone after the loss of his parents, a concern that drives his actions through his brush with the dark side at Fort Anaxes, his Jedi Trial in the hidden Lothal temple, and onward into the makeshift trilogy of episodes that end the season as the crew is forced to leave Kanan to be captured by the Inquisitor in "Call to Action."

Garazeb "Zeb" Orrelios is a much lesser success for *Rebels*' inaugural season. In the series' first regular episode, "Droids in Distress," it is revealed that Zeb's homeworld was devastated by Imperials using disruptors, the very type of weapons being stolen in the episode. By the episode's end, Zeb faces Agent Kallus in a bo-rifle[229] battle, wherein Zeb is driven by the knowledge that Kallus was in command of some or all of the Imperial forces on Lasan. After this brief encounter, the animosity borne of this tragic backstory only emerges once more in the season, when Zeb has a chance to shoot Kallus in "Empire Day" but is directed instead to fire on the Inquisitor. This plot thread is otherwise abandoned throughout the season in favor of slapstick between Zeb, Ezra, and Chopper, and an emerging brotherly banter dynamic between Lasat and Padawan. While this second thread of characterization does merge well into the family dynamic being displayed for the *Ghost* crew, Zeb's deeper development appears to have been almost completely dropped after "Droids in Distress," making him a more comedic and arguably less interesting character as the season progresses.

The other organic members of the *Ghost* family are the two female members of the core cast, Hera Syndulla and Sabine Wren. While the series rightly receives praise for having strong female characters akin, in some ways, to Leia Organa, Padmé Amidala, and Ahsoka Tano in their respective tales, it is also these two women whose backstories and motivations in season one are the least developed.

Hera starred in her first major adventure alongside Kanan in *A New Dawn*. While detailing the story of how the "mom and dad" of the *Ghost* family met, the novel focused almost entirely on the development of Kanan, rather than Hera. Fans learned only that she was an active Rebel investigating Imperial operations and often recruiting new agents or useful contacts. In the span of *Rebels*' first season, Hera's demeanor often leaves her the only consistently mature member of the crew, and she is certainly the mother figure of the group, but viewers learn next to nothing about her beyond what little was gleaned from *A New Dawn*. The extent to which she keeps things close to the chest is a point of frustration for Sabine in "Out of Darkness," but nothing new is revealed, as Sabine must simply learn to trust Hera without being privy to more information.

Even the exact nature of Hera's relationship with Kanan is left unclear. In *A New Dawn*, he wants to be romantically involved but she is unwilling due to her duties, and while Hera refers to him as "love" in the series and in the European *Rebels* comic "Learning Patience," the young reader adaptation (and expansion) of "Spark of Rebellion," Michael Kogge's *The Rebellion Begins*, seems to negate fan suppositions that the "love" references are romantic in nature. As Kanan's perspective reveals in the book, "Hera tossed around that word like it meant nothing. Years earlier, Kanan would have believed in her affection... Now he deflected her sarcasm with that of his own."

This, of course, does not necessarily mean that a relationship could not develop, and there are past examples of material from young-reader books being overwritten by later, more mainstream *Star Wars* stories. But one has to wonder whether this lack of romance is set in carbonite, given that it is unlikely the Story Group would have allowed Kogge to expand upon the nature of their relationship if it was not an intentional check of their status.

The promise of future revelations for Hera, a character strong in presence and action but not in backstory development, makes her more intriguing than frustrating. One potential future avenue for exploration comes from her very name. The announcement of Hera as a Syndulla raised immediate questions as to how she would be related to Cham Syndulla of the Ryloth episodes from *The Clone Wars*' first season. Interestingly, that relationship may have changed throughout the creative process. Lucasfilm's Shelly Shapiro, when asked about the connection at New York Comic-Con

2014, explained that Cham was Hera's uncle, a claim later flatly contradicted when Lucasfilm's Pablo Hidalgo (also of the Story Group), speaking with Andi Gutierrez of the official *Rebels Recon* online series, confirmed that Cham is, in fact, Hera's father. The relationship was later codified in print in the pages of Paul S. Kemp's novel *Lords of the Sith*, though Hera herself receives only brief mentions in the book and does not actually appear.

Sabine Wren, the crew's other consistent female presence, has also been on the losing end of character and backstory development. From the "Art Attack" short onward, viewers have seen her flare for art and explosives (especially when those two can be combined into a flashy, destructive extravaganza at Imperial expense). The loss of her "family" (an actual family or perhaps her people) to the Empire is briefly mentioned in "Spark of Rebellion," and we learn in "Out of Darkness" that she was a student at an academy on Mandalore before her trust was somehow betrayed. That, though, is the extent of her development so far. Viewers know nothing of the circumstances behind what happened on Mandalore, nor of her reasons for being part of the crew.

In fact, when the chance arrived to provide such backstory and greater development in the tie-in book *Sabine: My Rebel Sketchbook* (her equivalent of Ezra's *Rebel Journal*), readers learned very little about the character once again, with the only significant new detail being that it was Kanan who recruited Sabine into the crew, rather than Hera. Given that hints have been dropped about her past on Mandalore, one would expect that this is fodder for future stories that will explore her in more depth, the way audience members expect the same for Hera. From a perspective of the series' first season, however, it is hard to deny that the women in the crew, while strong in action and participation, have received the least detailed development of anyone save perhaps the crew's non-organic member.

The non-organic member in question is, of course, Chopper. (Technically, the droid's name is C1-10P, but that gets into the ridiculousness of how a "1-1" becomes an "H" and the galaxy far, far away uses the same letters and numbers as the modern western world, so perhaps his name is an issue for another time.) Chopper is the crew's resident homicidal maniac or Quentin Tarantino character. Often disagreeable but indispensable – and loyal to Kanan more than he would likely admit –

Chopper has demonstrated time and again his willingness to kill or destroy. This is perhaps most evident in “Rebel Resolve,” in which, in the span of 90 seconds, he opens an airlock that propels four stormtroopers into the vacuum of space and then sends a helpful droid that the crew has grown to like falling from the rising *Ghost* down to the surface of Lothal. (The droid, surprisingly, manages not to end up a pile of spare parts upon impact.) His recklessness with organic lifeforms nearly costs Ezra his life in “Rise of the Old Masters.” If not for some quick thinking and Force use by Kanan, Ezra would have been splattered on the surface of Lothal. (Perhaps there is a pattern here!)

Chopper approaches most situations with an attitude of annoyance and a vocabulary that, it seems, would need to be censored if it were not already *blaaps* and *braaps*. (Several times, one could argue that his statements, especially near the end of the season, have amounted to “WTF?”) The droid’s backstory remains a mystery, though the subject of less curiosity in fandom than those of Hera and Sabine, likely due to Chopper’s non-organic nature. His absence from *A New Dawn* suggests that he may have joined the crew after Kanan, but it certainly does not rule out Chopper already being aboard the *Ghost* and simply being never mentioned in the novel. No hints have yet been provided regarding his background as seeds for future episodes, though, so the likelihood of learning more of how the droid joined the crew seems lower than that of the other crewmembers.

The series’ Imperial regulars fare far worse in their development within the first season, though this is mitigated by the fact that none of these antagonists ever takes center stage in an episode of their own. Putting aside what might be called secondary Imperial characters (Commandant Cumberlayne Aresko, Taskmaster Myles Grint, and Minister Maketh Tua), two Imperials stand out as new antagonists in the series: Imperial Security Bureau Agent Kallus and the Inquisitor.

Kallus mirrors Zeb in that he receives his only significant character exploration in “Droids in Distress.” Just as Zeb gains a level of “humanity” as the audience learns of the Empire’s devastation of Lasan, a new level of menace and backstory is applied to Kallus when it is revealed that he commanded Imperials during that massacre. In fact, Kallus still carries a bo-rifle that he took from one of his victims. Imperial might is rarely in question in the series, but the early addition of this horrific angle on Kallus

provides a rare instance of raising the level of menace felt from the Empire without resorting to the use of a dark side Force user. Kallus is a simple, human soldier, but he is brutal and dangerous in his own right.

The Inquisitor, introduced briefly in “Spark of Rebellion” and more fully in “Rise of the Old Masters,” presents a more traditional *Star Wars* antagonist for *Rebels*. As a dark side warrior, the Inquisitor brings a look similar to that of the Son (from *The Clone Wars*’ Mortis arc), features akin to traditional horror icons (specifically vampires), and a red lightsaber. His weapon, in fact, carries forward another *Star Wars* tradition: the increasing gimmicking of lightsabers. Gone are the days of simple, single-bladed lightsabers. Now to be “cool,” such a weapon needs something unusual, like the ring and spinning features of the Inquisitor’s double-bladed 'saber or Ezra’s blaster/lightsaber combo. This trend continues on screen as well, in *The Force Awakens*. (One is reminded of the *Phineas and Ferb Star Wars* special: “We’re allowing modifications now, huh?”)

Design aside, the Inquisitor is an enigma to the audience. He is a dark side powerhouse, handily defeating Kanan in their earliest encounters and only becoming slightly less of a threat as Kanan expands his own skills. He is the *Rebels* equivalent of Darth Vader in *A New Hope*: dangerous, evil, and seemingly unstoppable, yet mysterious with few hints as to anything beyond the surface level of the character. Indeed, the most intriguing insight viewers receive regarding what goes on in the Inquisitor’s mind comes in his final words before he falls to his apparent death in “Fire Across the Galaxy:” “There are some things far more frightening than death.”[230] (Perhaps he is referring to being forced to endure season two of *Ewoks*.) With Vader now on Lothal and other villains previewed for the second season, it seems unlikely that this particular Inquisitor will ever see further depth of development or backstory. It would appear that he has simply served his purpose and been removed from play.

With a full season of *Rebels* aired as of this writing, it is easy to criticize the series for its lack of depth for certain primary characters, but as noted, viewers must temper that concern with recognition that in some cases, particularly with regard to the female characters, it is a near certainty that further development *is* coming. To paraphrase Yoda: “Patience. For the females there will be time for development and backstory as well!”

It’s a Small Galaxy After All: Existing Characters and *Rebels*

There is a saying in *Star Wars* fandom that became only more appropriate when Lucasfilm was purchased by Disney: “It’s a small galaxy after all.” The phrase was used to describe how everyone in the Legends continuity seemed to bump into each other, so that most major galactic events tended to center around a particular dozen or so major characters, and on a handful of planets. Sure, it made sense for storytelling purposes, but in a society as large as that seen in the galaxy far, far away, the likelihood of all major events and individuals crossing paths repeatedly seemed rather (or ridiculously) low. (Perhaps it was simply the “will of the Force” that brought them together? That seems to be the catchall means of rationalizing coincidence in the saga.)

As a major part of the new continuity’s foundation, *Rebels* had the chance to center around a new cast of characters and allow them to stand on their own without the necessity of an inordinate number of appearances by established characters to artificially boost the show’s credibility. It was relatively successful in that regard.

Until the final three episodes, the first season of *Rebels* used existing characters sparingly, though with varying degrees of success. “Spark of Rebellion” built on Kanan’s ties to the Jedi Order and escape from Order 66 (detailed later in the aforementioned *Kanan: The Last Padawan*) through a holographic recording of Obi-Wan Kenobi. The recording, one of two messages (one in video in this episode and one as text in the canonical novel *A New Dawn*), was created by Obi-Wan off-screen during his infiltration of the Jedi Temple with Yoda in *Revenge of the Sith*, and served to link Kanan to Kenobi without necessitating that Obi-wan actually participate in the episode. (Readers of *A New Dawn* would find this an even more poignant scene, given that it was young Caleb Dume, prior to his taking on the “Kanan Jarrus” alias, who suggested to Kenobi, during the Clone Wars, that the signal intended to order all Jedi back to Coruscant could instead be altered to warn Jedi away from the galactic capital.) The traditional science-fiction trope of bringing existing characters into the pilot

of a new series to establish familiarity had been used without feeling heavy-handed or unnatural.

"Spark of Rebellion," when first aired and released on DVD, began with Ezra on Lothal. A special airing on ABC, however, included a new introductory scene that featured Darth Vader speaking with the Inquisitor. The scene did little at the time to increase the Inquisitor's menace, but did serve to clarify his mission. By the end of the season, though, Vader would return (without a speaking role) in "Fire Across the Galaxy," to become a new threat to the heroes in the second season. As such, his appearances serve as bookends to season one, adding to the sense of this initial run of episodes being more of a single story than independent story arcs or episodes.

The first of the series' regular episodes, "Droids in Distress," immediately dipped back into the well of existing characters by featuring an adventure in which the *Ghost* crew crosses paths with R2-D2 and C-3PO, who are undercover on a mission for Bail Organa. While the episode was initially criticized for splitting the focus between the series' "real" heroes and the more Laurel and Hardy-like exploits of C-3PO and R2-D2, their use in the episode served a broader plot point for the season, by bringing the team's actions to the attention of Organa, who would be seen as an ally of the mysterious "Fulcrum" when saving the day in the season finale. Given that fans have yet to learn when Hera first began working with Fulcrum – who is not mentioned as a source for the crew's missions until four episodes later (in "Out of Darkness") – it is very possible that this encounter with Organa is what prompts Fulcrum to begin working with Hera in the first place. The use of the droids, while not at all subtle, thus serves a greater purpose.

Bail Organa and R2-D2 work together once more in the first regular episode of the series, "Droids in Distress."

The six episodes that followed "Droids in Distress" were devoid of established characters, using that time to develop the crew of the *Ghost* and their adversaries. The eighth and ninth episodes then returned to established characters, garnering a heavier measure of criticism than before.

"Path of the Jedi" further propelled Ezra along his path to becoming a true Padawan learner to Kanan, while also helping Kanan deal with his own doubts about whether he is a proper teacher for a young Jedi. While visiting a hidden Jedi Temple on Lothal, both Ezra and Kanan experience what appears to be a form of telepathic contact through the Force to Yoda, still in seclusion on Dagobah. No explanation is provided for how Yoda is able to make contact with the duo. Instead, Yoda simply brushes off Kanan's confusion with a statement that does nothing to explain his "appearance" in the episode, annoying many fans who felt the comment was directed specifically at the more nitpicky side of fandom: "Be not concerned with how."

To be fair, though Yoda does not explain his ability to speak with Kanan and Ezra, his comment that he was unable to do so until that moment suggests that communication is only possible while Ezra and Kanan are within the Jedi Temple (this also prevents Yoda from appearing repeatedly via telepathy, which would undermine Kanan's role as a teacher). Moreover, as odd as it may seem for Yoda to be reaching out through the Force and observing what Jedi and potential Jedi are doing on far-off worlds, there is precedent in the films. "This one a long time I have watched. All his life has

he looked away to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was, hmm, what he was doing," Yoda says of Luke in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Unless Yoda was making day trips to Tatooine to spy on Luke with a pair of tiny macrobinoculars, it would seem that this ability has been in Yoda's canonical repertoire since 1980.

Was Yoda's appearance in "Path of the Jedi" necessary? Probably not, but his role in the episode carries a level of gravitas that lends Ezra's training a more official feel than simply making him the unofficial apprentice of a former Padawan who never finished his own training. It is, in essence, Yoda's tentative stamp of approval on Ezra.

If Yoda's brief role in the season lends credibility to the Jedi training plot thread and serves the series well, the existing character who makes his first appearance in the series in the very next episode is the exact opposite – a dazzling failure of character use.

"Idiot's Array" brings Lando Calrissian into *Rebels*.[231] The episode is arguably the weakest of the season, attempting a comedic interlude that gives it a feeling more akin to what one might have seen in Nelvana's *Droids* or *Ewoks* cartoons than what fans had come to expect of *Rebels*. Despite including some witty banter between crewmembers, the episode is held back by rather convenient ("be not concerned with how!") plotting, ridiculous elements like the "puffer pig" (literally a pig that could expand like a puffer fish into a huge balloon-esque version of itself, mostly for unfunny comic relief), and the least menacing villain of the series thus far. (Azmorigan, a slovenly slaver based on Jabba the Hutt concept art, may not have ever felt like a real threat to the crew or to Lando, but to be fair, his lecherous characterization when considering Hera as a slave could make Jabba's suggestive licking of Leia Organa in *Return of the Jedi* seem like the lesser of evils.) To make matters worse for Lando in the context of the first season, his is the only episode, with the exception of some of the "shorts," to have no bearing whatsoever on the rest of the season. It is the only true "throwaway" episode of the season, but one that would put Lando in a position to help the heroes at the beginning of season two.

Throughout the bulk of the season, the Imperial threat on Lothal is personified in new *Rebels* characters like the Inquisitor, Agent Kallus, and, to a lesser extent, Cumberlyane Aresko, Myles Grint, and Maketh Tua. The "Jedi versus Jedi hunter" dynamic pairs the Inquisitor nicely with Kanan

and Ezra, while Kallus becomes a more personal adversary when audiences learn of his role in the decimation of Lasan in “Droids in Distress,” which puts him into conflict with Zeb on a more personal level. The final three episodes of the season ratchet up the Imperial threat by bringing in an established character to lead the Empire on Lothal: Grand Moff Tarkin.

Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin, the villain portrayed by Peter Cushing in *A New Hope*, serves as a primary antagonist in *Rebels*.

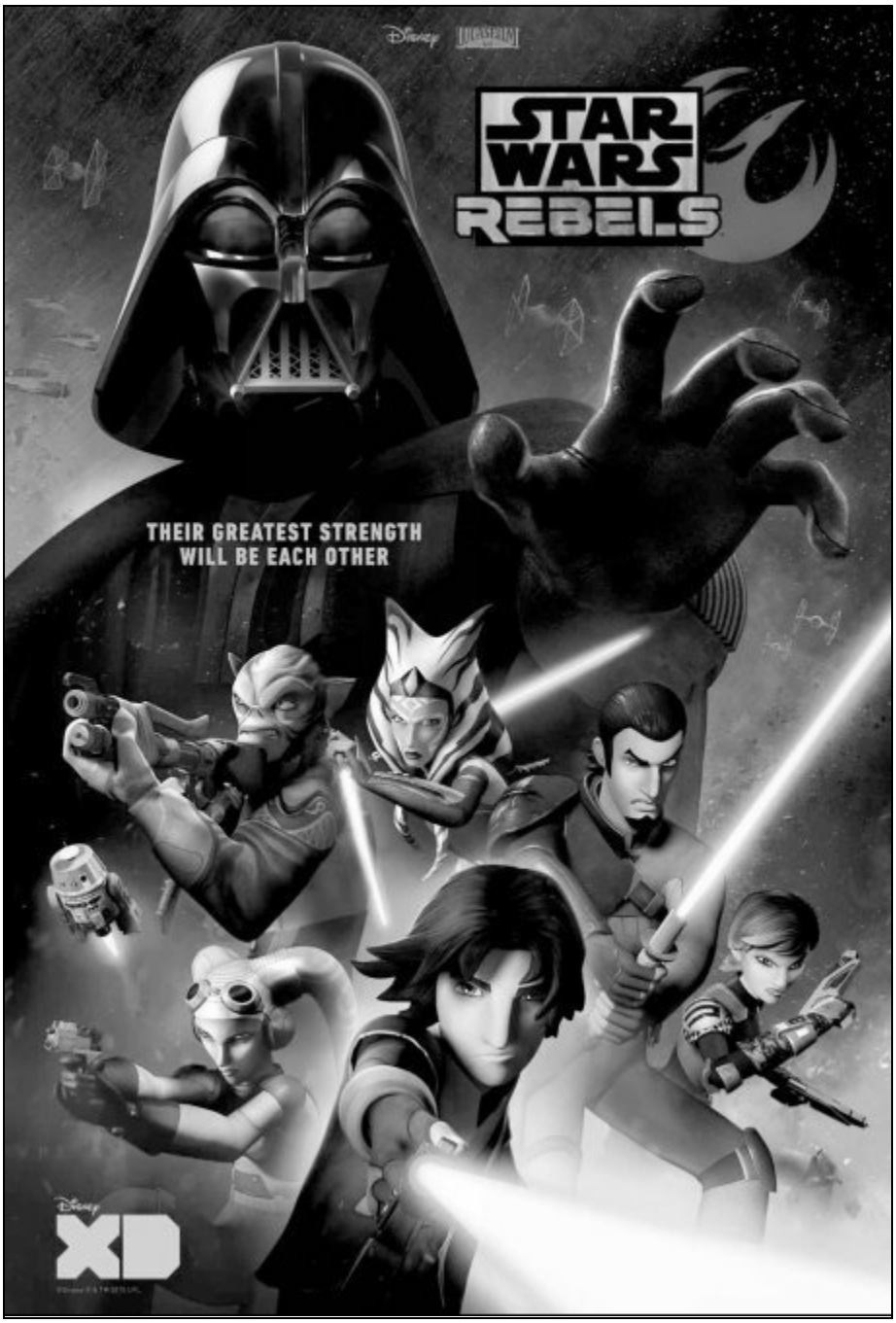
Rather than being a simple one-off cameo, Tarkin’s role was to be the new primary antagonist to shake up the *status quo* for the remainder of the season. Tarkin serves to connect *Rebels* not only to *A New Hope* but also to *The Clone Wars*, given his multiple appearances in that series (voiced, as in *Rebels*, by Steven Stanton). Tarkin becomes the new face of the Empire to the heroes, having minor but recurring Imperials Aresko and Grint killed (in “Call to Action”), then remaining on Lothal with Vader at his side after the apparent death of the Inquisitor (in “Fire Across the Galaxy”). He proves himself able to lead the Empire in a more effective fashion than his comrades, managing to hold Kanan prisoner and take more drastic actions to quell rebellious activity. As he states to Kanan, Tarkin knows “what it takes to win a war.”

While one wonders how long Tarkin can stick around on Lothal, given his other duties as governor of the Outer Rim and overseer of the construction of a deep space mobile battle station (the Death Star), as seen in James Luceno’s canonical novel *Tarkin*, his impact has been to make the Empire, already a credible threat in the series, even more dangerous. (The same will soon likely be said of Vader, but not for the first season.)

Perhaps the most controversial inclusion and the bantha in the room is the revelation, in “Fire Across the Galaxy,” that the mysterious Fulcrum is, in fact, Ahsoka Tano of *The Clone Wars*. Outside of a vision experienced by Yoda in the *Clone Wars* episode “Destiny,” Ahsoka had not been seen since “The Wrong Jedi.” Having left the Jedi Order, she has become a Rebel leader working with Bail Organa. Critics of this choice have expressed a wariness that *Rebels* could simply become *The Clone Wars 2.0* if too much focus is placed on Ahsoka, or even on the dynamic between the former Padawan and her “more machine now than man” former master, Darth Vader. Those praising the decision to make Ahsoka the true identity of Fulcrum have tended to laud the opportunities her reappearance presents for providing greater closure for fans of *The Clone Wars*. It is that bridging of *Rebels* and *The Clone Wars* through Ahsoka that appears to have rekindled a “love/hate” relationship between fans and the character.

How Ahsoka’s role will develop has yet to be seen, but comments from Dave Filoni, Pablo Hidalgo, and others suggest that the character is to be used sparingly. In fact, holding her appearance until the season-one finale was a conscious choice by the creative team to allow the show’s new primary characters to stand and thrive on their own before allowing this returning character to possibly steal the spotlight. The potential for tales that pit Ahsoka against Vader and otherwise explain where she has been during the intervening 15 years is high, while the cautious approach taken by the showrunners would seem to provide some assurance to those wary of her return that she is not a character whom they intend to overuse or allow to supplant the crew of the *Ghost* as the focus of *Rebels*. Time will tell.

At the time of this writing, only the special premiere episodes have aired, but the second season’s trailers have announced the return of more *The Clone Wars* veterans (e.g. Captain Rex and Hondo Ohnaka). That, however, is not apropos for an analysis of the premiere season.



The teaser poster for the second season of *Rebels* promises continued adventure and more Ahsoka Tano. Hopefully, it will live up to that promise and continue to bridge the gap between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*.

One final consideration involving guest characters is in continuity of performance. Each of these existing characters was portrayed in *Rebels* by someone who had previously voiced them in earlier films or television episodes. In the cases of Yoda, Lando, and Vader, all were played by their film actors or voice actors (Frank Oz, Billy Dee Williams, and James Earl

Jones, respectively). For Oz and Jones, this was particularly unusual, given that the characters had previously been portrayed outside of live action by voice actors like Tom Kane and Matt Sloan. Ahsoka was portrayed again by voice actress Ashley Eckstein, who had originated the role on *The Clone Wars*.

Regarding Obi-Wan and Tarkin, the roles were performed by the voice actors who portrayed them in *The Clone Wars*, James Arnold Taylor and Steven Stanton. In the case of Tarkin, the actor who portrayed the character in *A New Hope*, Peter Cushing, had passed away in 1994, making Stanton the most logical choice. For Obi-Wan, it is interesting to note that while Sir Alec Guinness, who portrayed the character in the original trilogy, passed away in 2000, the actor who played his younger self in the prequel trilogy, Ewan McGregor, is alive and well, making this the only situation in which the film voice actor was still around but did not reprise the role for *Rebels*, leaving it to the prolific talents of Taylor. This reliance on voice talents with whom the audience would be familiar lends a solid sense of performance continuity to the series, and denotes the extent to which the creative team is going to make the series "authentic" *Star Wars*.

Overall, then, barring the poor use of Lando Calrissian in "Idiot's Array," the first season of *Rebels* was able to use existing characters (and vocal talents) in ways that served the broader story arcs of the series and, while raising the usual questions of just how "small" the galaxy might be, did so in a manner that did not utterly strain credulity in providing reasons for such guest appearances.

Final Verdict

In a time of great change for *Star Wars* as a franchise, what "counts" in the saga, and which characters are among the vanguard of its current expansion, the premiere season of *Star Wars: Rebels* came through as a relative success. The lessons learned from the pitfalls experienced by *The Clone Wars* have given birth to a series with a stronger, tighter storytelling structure, a large cast of new, interesting (if, in some cases, underdeveloped) characters, and the freedom to explore their adventures and their era of *Star Wars* without the likelihood of the kind of abrasive encounters with prior continuity that frustrated *The Clone Wars* viewers.

The show has captured the spirit of the original trilogy, yet has connected itself to the prequel era as well. With the addition of Ahsoka Tano and Darth Vader to its recurring characters, its potential for the second season and beyond is great, but the opportunities to go awry have also expanded. Further success lies in the hands of Dave Filoni, Simon Kinberg, and the Story Group.

It is unfortunate that there remain *Star Wars* fans who refuse to give *Rebels* a chance due to the transformation of the Expanded Universe's earlier continuity into Legends and the launch of new canonical tales like *Rebels* in its place. In so doing, these fans are missing out on what has been one of the most entertaining entries in the *Star Wars* saga (canon or otherwise) in years.

May the crew of the *Ghost* continue flying.

Surrounding Us and Binding Us Together: *Star Wars* Across the Generations

by Dayton Ward

May 1977: I was staring my tenth birthday in the face on a hot Saturday afternoon in Tampa, Florida, and my friend's mother dropped the two of us at the curb of a neighborhood movie theater. In a bid to escape the oppressive summer heat and humidity, we decided to suck up some air conditioning while taking in a cool-looking "space movie" we'd seen advertised on television throughout the past week or so: *Star Wars*.

We were among the first to behold on the screen those fateful words: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...." In the years to follow, legions of fans would join us, beginning with that first wondrous summer or else during the film's re-release to theaters, and later with the advent of home video. How many people discovered *Star Wars* thanks to renting a tape from some video rental store? How many people even *remember* video rental stores? It didn't matter where someone got his or her start. Once you were in the club, then you were in the club from that point forward.

Skip ahead to 2015: After nearly four decades, *Star Wars* has embedded itself within our collective consciousness. Social media now feeds our anticipation for a forthcoming film or television series for months ahead of time, and *Star Wars* is no exception to this "new normal." The first teaser trailer for *The Force Awakens* so ably demonstrated as much when it debuted in November 2014, more than a year ahead of the new film's scheduled release date. It wasn't much – just a few teasing scenes to whet our appetites – but it was enough to set fans abuzz for weeks. Then a second trailer arrived, this time containing a narration by Mark Hamill as

Luke Skywalker and including references to Princess Leia Organa and Darth Vader, and capping off with a brief, tantalizing peek at Han Solo and Chewbacca aboard the *Millennium Falcon*, with Han proclaiming, “Chewie, we’re home.”

They were home, and so were we.

Star Wars was back. Again.

I had a good feeling about this.

Anticipation: Then and Now

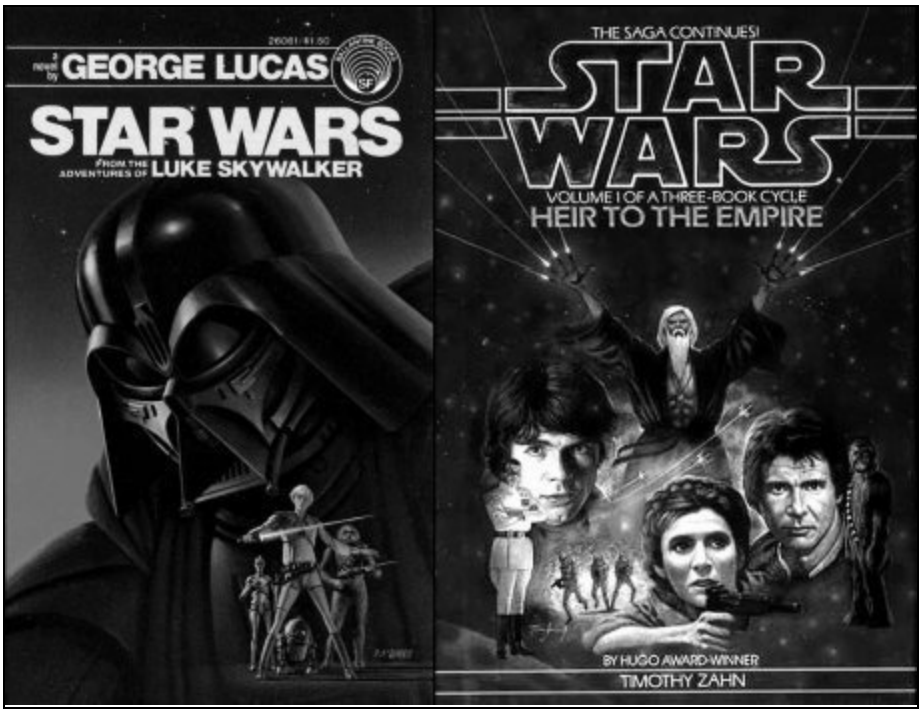
In any number of ways, 1977 and 2015 are worlds apart. In the era of films that was home to the release of the original *Star Wars* (or *Episode IV* or *A New Hope*, as we now call it), television, newspaper, and radio ads were still the primary way in which most people outside the industry learned about new movies. First and foremost, there was no internet. There was no way to watch a teaser trailer a year before the film's release, and then spend the ensuing months picking it apart while jumping to all manner of conclusions until the release date arrived and we went to see the movie anyway. If we were lucky, we might catch a trailer at the theater before some other film, but there certainly wasn't any sort of "*Star Wars* marketing machine" in place. Instead, we relied upon magazines like *Starlog* for our genre movie and TV intel, or – if we could find it – *Cinefantastique*, along with the occasional picture or short article in mainstream pop-culture publications like *People*.

For *Star Wars*, I was already aware of the plot and characters, because I'd read the novelization that was published months ahead of the film's premiere. Rather than feeling as though everything had been "spoiled," I was even more pumped to see the actual movie.

Those were the days, right?

When the original film hit screens, it did so with little fanfare. Word of mouth is what gave *Star Wars* its legs, and made it a box-office champion all through the summer and well into the fall of 1977. By the time *The Empire Strikes Back* was announced, with information conveyed to fans through publications like *Starlog*, as well as *Bantha Tracks* (the newsletter of Lucasfilm's Official *Star Wars* Fan Club), fans were on their way to

becoming their own full-fledged global phenomenon, on par with *Star Trek*'s "Trekkies" and *Doctor Who*'s "Whovians."



Pictured above: the 1976 novelization of *Star Wars* by George Lucas (and ghost-written by Alan Dean Foster), and *Heir to the Empire* by Timothy Zahn, which jumpstarted the Expanded Universe in 1991.

Unlike the first film, lines for the premiere screenings of *The Empire Strikes Back* were in place hours, if not days, ahead of time. During the three years since the first film, fans had been subsisting on appetizers in the form of Marvel's *Star Wars* comics and a handful of novels, like Alan Dean Foster's *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* and Brian Daley's *Han Solo at Star's End*. We were more than ready for the main course. I spent several glorious hours in the blazing Florida sun on that May afternoon in 1980, waiting along with hundreds of other fans for my chance to see our heroes back in action. Then, we repeated the entire cycle all over again for three more years before the journey of Luke Skywalker from young idealistic farm boy to Jedi Knight concluded in 1983 with the premiere of *Return of the Jedi*.

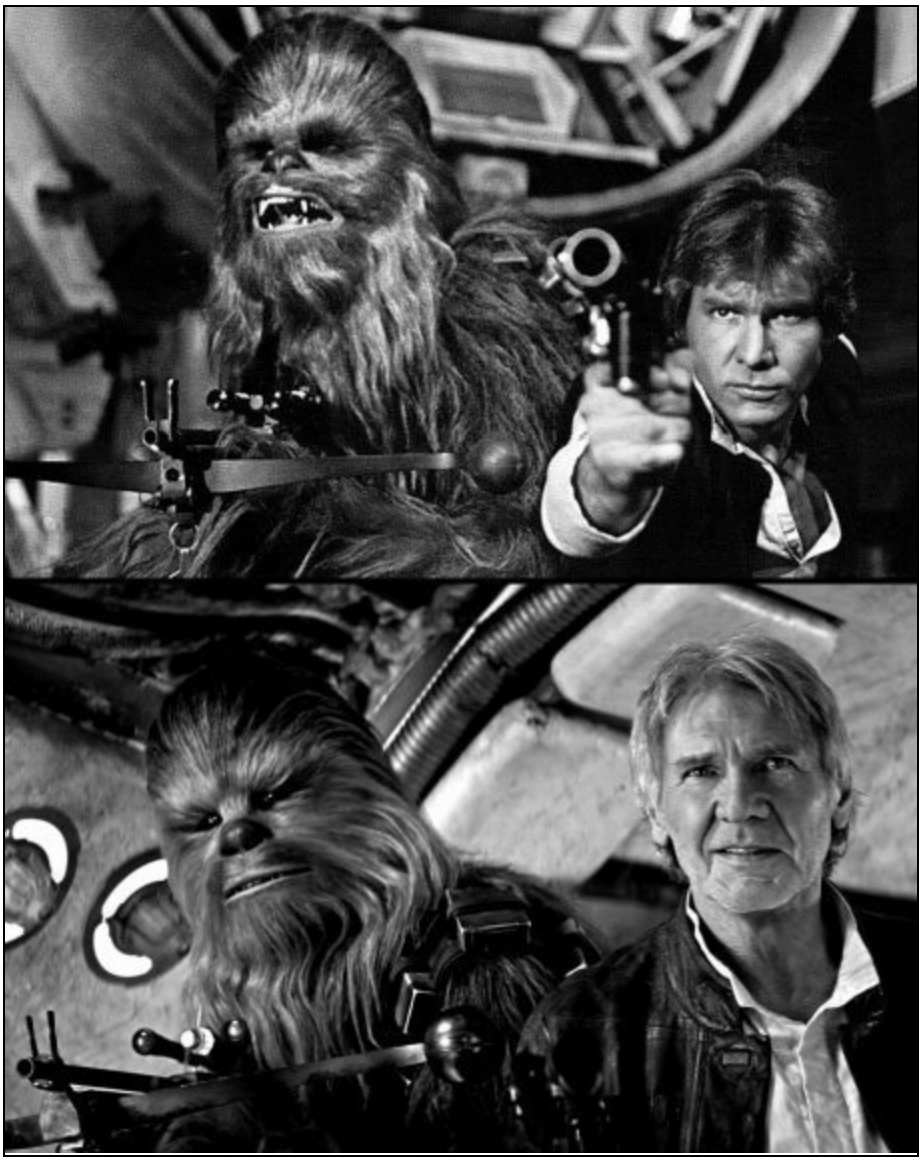
As it's been for many years now, announcing a major new *Star Wars* project is greeted with worldwide celebration and scrutiny. In the run-up to its release in 1999, *The Phantom Menace* was the first to enjoy this sort of enhanced attention thanks to the internet, including the franchise's own website, StarWars.com. As the date for the new film's release drew closer,

devoted fans were camping out in front of theaters for days and weeks just to buy advance tickets to the first day's showings. We'd been living off comics, novels, and games for 16 years by that point, and the *Special Edition* re-releases of the original trilogy of films had fueled our anticipation for new *Star Wars* on the big screen. The franchise was now a full-scale entertainment and merchandising juggernaut. The entire prequel trilogy received ever-increasing fan attention within the virtual realms of online service providers like America Online and the Microsoft Network, as well as fan-based websites and message boards.

Revenge of the Sith bowed in 2005, bringing with it the conclusion of the prequel trilogy and – for all we knew at the time – the possible end of *Star Wars* on the silver screen for the foreseeable future. However, the franchise has been anything but dormant since then, and we fans have had quite a lot to tide us over, even before learning that the Force was soon to awaken. We've had two iterations of *The Clone Wars* presented as animated series (the second of which actually launched with a new theatrical film), and 2014 saw the premiere of *Star Wars: Rebels*, set years before the events of the original movie. In the wake of Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm, *The Force Awakens* was but the first of several new *Star Wars* projects announced for film, television, the internet, books, comics, and games.

Today, reaction to such news and rumors is all but instantaneous, thanks to the immediacy of social-media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and that enthusiasm isn't reserved just to the fans. Those "on the inside" are getting into the game as well. Director J.J. Abrams, notorious for his secrecy and security to prevent or at least minimize the propensity for leaked photos and other gossip from his high-profile productions, still managed to offer fans a bit of good-natured teasing on his own terms, right from the set of *The Force Awakens*. Even before the first trailer's release, Abrams had already dropped a now-classic photo taunt on us when he answered the question of whether the *Millennium Falcon* would appear in the new film.

Such pictures are the sort of thing that might only have been seen as an “Exclusive!” in the pages of *Starlog* magazine in 1976, but today? Abrams just tossed it into the social-media ether, and we fans ate it up like chocolate-covered meth.



Then and now: Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew) and Han Solo (Harrison Ford) in 1977's *Star Wars: A New Hope* (top) and in 2015's *The Force Awakens* (2015).

When the first teaser for *Episode VII* was released, there was something for fans old and new alike. New faces and creatures greeted us, bringing with them a few glimpses of things from the earlier films: stormtroopers, though with updated armor; X-wings in flight, as though preparing for combat; and the *Millennium Falcon*, soaring toward the clouds and the stars beyond. People were analyzing the footage frame by frame, looking for clues, Easter eggs, hidden messages for Satan, and whatever other bits of foreshadowing could be mustered by Abrams and his merry band.

Star Wars is something I've been able to share with my daughters as they've grown older. We started with *The Clone Wars* animated series and

now we’re enjoying *Rebels* together. When I thought they could “handle” them, we watched the six films. For those wondering, I did indeed start with *Star Wars* (a.k.a. *A New Hope*), because, as the saying goes: “*Episode IV* comes first. It’s just good parenting.”

Having received the proper grounding in the *Star Wars* mythos, they were more than ready to watch the teasers for *The Force Awakens*. Together, we watched them four or five times, and it seemed as though my kids were getting more excited with each subsequent viewing. They weren't arguing about which parts did or did not clash with their perceptions of what had been depicted in previous films, books, and comics. Their reaction was, essentially, “More *Star Wars*? *Cool!*”

The internet and its capacity for rapid information exchange have both good and bad points, of course. My own venturing to the Web revealed responses to the trailer that ranged from unbridled exhilaration to accusations of abusing individual childhoods. Some of the trepidation was certainly understandable. After all, we were talking about the first *Star Wars* film created without the direct involvement of George Lucas, the man who gave us this wondrous universe.

Despite this, many aspects of the new movie’s production filled me with hope. For instance, it’s hard not to get caught up in director J.J. Abrams’s obvious love for the franchise, and his passion and desire to do justice to what’s come before. That much was evident in the new film’s casting. In a manner similar to how he lured Leonard Nimoy out of retirement to reprise his iconic role of Spock for the silver-screen reboot of the venerable *Star Trek* franchise, Abrams was able to entice Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, and Harrison Ford to return to the characters that made them famous. Ford, in particular, was a major coup, given his comments in numerous interviews throughout the years about having no interest in taking up the role of Han Solo ever again. With Abrams notching these early victories, I found it difficult to view the new film with a cynical eye. Instead, I embraced my children's infectious enthusiasm, and through them I was able to recapture some of the magic I’d felt so long ago. Here was something that bridged all those years separating my kids from my own youth, that we could enjoy together as well as on our respective terms.

Experiencing *Star Wars*: Then and Now

Like many fans of that era, I spent the summer of 1977 consumed by *Star Wars*. I gave up counting how many times my friends and I begged our parents for advances on our allowances so we could run back to the theater to watch it yet another time. We simply couldn't get enough of it. What was it about this one movie that managed to utterly capture our imagination? Though it remains an engaging story with all the classic elements of good versus evil and heroes and villains galore, it's not as though it's completely unfamiliar on a rather basic level, right?

I mean, stop me if you've heard this one before: A young man living a simple life in a faraway realm is shown a destiny that is far greater than the future to which he thought he was fated. Benefiting from the sage counsel of a wizened mentor with a mysterious past who wields powers he doesn't understand, our hero takes up the fight against those who would do evil. After he triumphs against the forces of tyranny and oppression, rewards and status are bestowed upon him, and he even gets the girl.

Everybody was thinking King Arthur, right?

The story of Luke Skywalker is cut from the same cloth, inspired by tales of legend that have entertained children for centuries. It also owes rather a lot to the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, as well as the fondly remembered cinematic adventures of space heroes like Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. Of course, Luke got thrown for a bit of a loop with that whole "she's my sister" thing when it came to getting the girl, but work with me here.

Obviously, I didn't know or appreciate much of that at age nine. I wasn't making comparisons between *Star Wars* and any stories which may have served as its muse, mostly because I was too busy going gaga over the amazing spaceships, the crazy aliens, the laser rifles, and the laser swords (excuse me, “lightsabers”), and watching my new heroes commit ever-escalating acts of derring-do. While my friends were fighting over who got to be Luke Skywalker when we took to “playing *Star Wars*” at the local playground or in a friend's backyard, I was all about Han Solo. That dude was *cool*, with his gigantic teddy bear best friend, his blaster slung low on his hip, and his weird-looking spaceship. Yes, I said “weird.” After all, I’d gotten to this point while feasting on the Starship *Enterprise*, the *Jupiter 2*,

and various other saucers and rockets from movies and TV. Oh, and the Eagles from *Space: 1999*, because I really do still want one of those.

As for Han, he just kept getting cooler, from stealing scenes in the original film to stumbling into all sorts of trouble in the first Marvel *Star Wars* comics to starring in his own trilogy of novels written by Brian Daley. Han and Chewbacca were my favorite characters pretty much from the jump. By the time *The Empire Strikes Back* came along, I'd started to figure out what girls were, and why it was awesome that Han and Princess Leia seemed to be hitting it off. By the time she told him she loved him, I was thinking it was a pretty good deal to be the rogue scoundrel space pilot.

Then Han was turned into a carbonite Popsicle, and I was over it. For a while, anyway.

Jump forward 30-odd years, to the second trailer for *The Force Awakens*. As excited as we were to see that first teaser's footage, the second, longer trailer was what really grabbed my attention. Why? That last, all-too-brief scene, with an older Han Solo and Chewbacca inside the *Millennium Falcon*, was all it took. I was nine years old, all over again.

My daughters had actually experienced a similar moment with their own favorite *Star Wars* character, Ahsoka Tano. Here was a strong female who possessed many of the traits exhibited by Leia in the original trilogy and any number of novels and comic books. Introduced in the *Clone Wars* animated theatrical film as Anakin Skywalker's Padawan, she left the Jedi Order near the end of the subsequent TV series, and her fate following the Clone Wars and *Revenge of the Sith* remained a mystery. When she appeared in an episode of the newer animated series, *Rebels*, both of my kids were ecstatic. She had survived Order 66 and the extermination of the Jedi Knights, and now she was back, helping with the fledgling Rebellion against the Empire.

Once Ahsoka showed up on the newer show, my young daughters literally gasped and made sure I understood who we were seeing. This is the character to whom my daughters most relate, as she, like *Rebels*' Hera Syndulla and Sabine Wren, fights alongside her male counterparts, and is who *they* think is *cool* in the same way I latched on to Han Solo all those years ago.

Star Wars: Just for Kids, or for the Kid in All of Us?

As seems to happen with regularity in some circles of comic book fandom, the question of whether *Star Wars* is meant for kids comes up on a frequent basis. George Lucas has always been rather insistent that this is indeed the case, and the aisles and aisles of toys and other youth-focused merchandise would seem to support that contention. My nine-year-old self would've agreed with Mr. Lucas in 1977, and my young daughters are definitely of that mind, such as when they wear a T-shirt emblazoned with Darth Vader and Princess Leia, and captioned with “Daddy’s Little Girl.”

So, yes or no? Or, is *Star Wars* at its best when it strives to appeal to both demographics, and everything in between? To me, it seems obvious that it's aimed at fans of every age. That much is evident from a merchandising standpoint, if nothing else. Indeed, *Star Wars* has always been easily marketed to audiences of all ages, just as is done with popular comic book heroes like Superman and Batman. Versions of those characters are simultaneously aimed at children and adults. For example, my daughters and I watched *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* together, having fun with the lighthearted, animated adventures of the Caped Crusader. None of that stopped me from enjoying Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight* trilogy, or revisiting some of the darker-themed comics stories like *The Long Halloween*, *Hush*, or *The Killing Joke*.

Star Wars, as a franchise, works in much the same way. While the films have occasionally strayed into darker territory with their characters and themes, overall they present a positive message of hope and appeal to a diverse demographic. Despite being animated television, *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels* shouldn't be dismissed as “kid shows,” and if you wander into any bookstore, you’re liable to find a wide selection of *Star Wars* titles in both the adults and “young readers” sections.

Then, there are the toys.

You know that nine-year-old boy I keep talking about? He's pretty jealous these days. Where was all this amazing stuff when I was a kid? Those of you old enough to have seen the original film in theaters know that *Star Wars* toys and other merchandise were a little slow out of the gate

in 1977. No one thought the movie would be the huge hit it eventually became. Toy manufacturer Kenner, knowing their run of *Star Wars* action figures, vehicles, and playsets wouldn't be ready in time for Christmas, actually sold "vouchers" that guaranteed customers the first set of figures from their new line. Kids had to wait until the spring of 1978 to get little plastic replicas of Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Chewbacca, and R2-D2. Of course, that was just the tip of the action figure iceberg.

Companies dealing in *Star Wars* merchandise have long since learned their lesson. Now, premiere dates for toys and other products at stores like Toys"R"Us are their own high-profile events, rivaling the sort of attraction that ardent shoppers give to "Black Friday" during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. As I write this, companies like Hasbro and Lego are gearing up for a massive release of new toys and games based on *The Force Awakens*, and there's already a slew of merchandise tying into the older films, as well as the current *Rebels* series.

I've been scouting those goods, because guess who wants Ahsoka action figures? Meanwhile, I'm thinking of donating blood until I can save up enough cash for that giant 18-foot *Millennium Falcon* replica from Hot Toys. Products for the new film promise to deliver what's already been commonplace in this realm for years, offering selections for everyone from the youngest fans all the way up to the high-end collector with vast amounts of disposable income.

Beyond the things one can buy, the stories themselves just grab people, regardless of their age. When all is said and done, the *Star Wars* films are fun, escapist space opera with broad appeal, and trying to stray too far to either side of that strike zone, either by making it more "kid-friendly" or forcing it to be "darker and grittier," is a mistake. Recent interviews with the cast and crew of *The Force Awakens* seem to indicate they also understand the balance they need to strike with the new film.

In an article published in the June 2015 issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine[232], writer Bruce Handy describes Abrams's attempts to evoke what he loved most about the original films, which he first saw as a young boy. “Of course,” Handy explains, “that’s what most fans old enough to have sex would want from any new *Star Wars* movie: recapturing the virgin rush of one’s first encounters with the series – which, I suppose, is a fancier way of saying everyone wants a new *Star Wars* movie to make them feel

like a kid again. To Abrams' taste, that meant channeling the spirit of the original trilogy."

I'm, therefore, forced to disagree with Mr. Lucas on this point. *Star Wars* is for kids, but it's also for those adults who still harbor a bit of kid inside them.

Enduring Appeal: Then and Now

Before I experienced the total, unmitigated spectacle of awesomeness that was the original *Star Wars*, science fiction for me was dominated in the mid-1970s by reruns of older television shows and movies on Saturday afternoons: *Star Trek*, *Lost in Space*, and *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, just to name a few examples, along with films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* or the various *Planet of the Apes* movies. In fact, the apes had come and gone with their own television series, along with that other fondly remembered favorite, *Space: 1999*. And *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman* were still carrying out their slow-motion antics in prime time. Fare like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* were still a ways off, as were Christopher Reeve's first *Superman* flight and *Alien* wondering if anyone could hear us scream in space.

Nine-year-old me had to process how *Star Wars* had moved in and – in many cases – supplanted much of what I'd been watching and enjoying up to that point. While the luster may have faded for many of those older series and films I enjoyed in my youth, my enjoyment of *Star Wars* continues unabated. Sure, it hasn't always been at the forefront of my awareness, particularly during those long stretches when the films weren't being produced, but whenever a new movie was announced? I was right back where I'd left off. I'd be grabbed by a desire to re-watch the previous films, or to go back and revisit a couple of the novels or comic storylines that had helped to fill the gap during those "lean years." The same thing happened last year, once we started hearing about *The Force Awakens*.

Do we still look at *Star Wars* and how it compares to the rest of the science-fiction landscape? It was a topic of some discussion during the lead-up to the theatrical release of *The Phantom Menace*. 17 years after *Return of the Jedi*'s debut, there was concern that *Star Wars* might no longer be "relevant." Science fiction on television and film had undergone

an evolution of sorts. *Star Trek* continued on the silver screen and returned to TV during that period, and new films and episodes were being produced at a regular and rapid pace. Films like *Blade Runner* and *Back to the Future* had cemented themselves as icons of the genre, and new franchises like *Alien*, *Predator*, and *The Terminator* had risen up as contenders for fandom's attention. How would new *Star Wars* movies stack up against all of that?

As it happened, they did rather well. Over the course of its three films, the prequel trilogy reaffirmed *Star Wars* as an integral component of modern pop culture. Though reaction to the trilogy is all over the fan spectrum, there's no denying the franchise's durable popularity and profitability.

Even when something comes along that's not actually a new film, *Star Wars* can still command attention. In 1991, nearly a decade following the release of *Return of the Jedi*, Bantam Books announced that it would be publishing new *Star Wars* novels, set after the events of the film and carrying forward the story of our favorite characters in the aftermath of the Empire's defeat. *Heir to the Empire*, the first book in a trilogy written by celebrated science-fiction author Timothy Zahn, was anticipated for months ahead of its publication and welcomed by fans eager for fresh *Star Wars* tales. The book was also the starting point for a new era of *Star Wars* fiction that continues to this day.

Still, can a new *Star Wars* film succeed in 2015, a full decade after the release of *Revenge of the Sith*? During that interval, the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* earned its place among the best science-fiction television series. This year alone, we've had new installments for veteran film franchises like *Mad Max*, *Jurassic Park*, and *The Terminator*. And with its 50th anniversary looming next year, *Star Trek* is once again making a play for mainstream popularity on the silver screen with another big-budget installment of its rebooted continuity. Even *Planet of the Apes* has been reinvigorated, thanks to two successful films that reinterpreted its basic premise for a modern audience, with a third entry coming in 2017. History suggests that *Star Wars* can, indeed, thrive once again.

Disney certainly seems determined to compete on this new playing field, announcing multiple films to be released throughout the next several

years. In addition to the untitled *Episodes VIII* and *IX*, there also will be standalone movies focusing on individual characters from the mythos and grouped under the umbrella title *Star Wars Anthology*. The first of these, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, will be set before the events of *A New Hope* and tell the story of the Rebels who stole the plans to the original Death Star. Additional movies centering on Han Solo, Boba Fett, and (if rumors are correct) Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda are also coming our way.

Before all of that, of course, we have *The Force Awakens*. When we go to the theater to see it, my oldest daughter will be nine years old, just as I was when I first watched the original *Star Wars* on that hot Tampa day in 1977. That she and her sister want to experience this with me is magical. I'll be grinning like an idiot as the lights go down and those first, oh-so-familiar words flash across the screen.

To borrow a phrase from Darth Vader, “The circle is now complete.”

So, yes, it seems *Star Wars* is back, again, ready to hang around for years to come and entice yet another generation of fans to travel to that galaxy far, far away.

I’ve got a good feeling about this.

The theatrical poster for *Episode VII*, released on 18 October 2015, features new characters Rey (Daisy Ridley, center), Finn (John Boyega, right), Kylo Ren (Adam Driver, top left), Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac, center), Phasma (Gwendoline Christie, bottom center), and BB-8 (center left); original characters Han Solo, Leia Organa, and Chewbacca; the *Millennium Falcon*; and a suspicious lack of Luke Skywalker.

About the Contributors

Joseph F. Berenato obtained a B.A. in English and spent four years as the entertainment editor of *The Hammonton Gazette* before returning to his roots at his family's blueberry farm in Hammonton, N.J. He was a contributor to *Gotham City 14 Miles*, and he is currently under contract to author *Something Strange: The Unauthorized Ghostbusters Encyclopedia* and co-author *It's Alive! The Complete Universal Monsters Encyclopedia*, with Jim and Becky Beard. In 2014, Joe conceived, edited, and contributed to Sequart's *New Life and New Civilizations: Exploring Star Trek Comics*. In addition to Sequart's *Star Wars* essay books, he co-edited *The Sacred Scrolls: Comics on the Planet of the Apes* (and its forthcoming companion, *Bright Eyes, Ape City: Examining the Planet of the Apes Mythos*, both with Rich Handley). Joe wrote essays for IDW Publishing's *Star Trek: Gold Key Archives Volume 3* and *Star Trek* #50, and also contributed to ATB Publishing's upcoming *Star Trek* anthology *Outside In: TOS 110*. He is an editor at Hasslein Books and an adjunct professor with both Atlantic-Cape Community College and Salem Community College (through which he also teaches Freshman Comp to inmates at South Woods State Prison), and recently received an M.A. in Writing from Rowan University. You can find Joe at jfberenato.wordpress.com and on Twitter at @JFBerenato.

Jean-François Boivin is a life-long collector of all things *Star Wars*, Cthulhu mythos, *Aliens*, *Predator*, and *Godzilla*, as well as a horror movie expert. He is a part-time writer, and has assisted other authors on research for their works. His first short story, "Calamité," was published in the small-press 1991 French Canadian anthology *H-3027 Rouge*. He also co-wrote (with Abel G. Peña) *Echoes of the Jedi*, the fourth adventure of the *Dawn of*

Defiance RPG campaign, which was available on Wizards.com in 2008. Currently, JF is writing *The Unauthorized Chronology of the Alien / Predator Universe* for Hasslein Books. He still owns his original VHS recordings of *The Ewok Adventure*, and of episode six of *Ewoks and Droids Adventure Hour*.

Joe Bongiorno is the owner and founder of The Royal Publisher of Oz and the creator of The Royal Timeline of Oz (www.oztimeline.net), the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe Timeline (starwarstimeline.net), and the *X-Files* Chronology (xfilestimeline.net). Joe co-wrote a detailed article about Marvel Comics' *Star Wars* aliens with Rich Handley for the first issue of *Star Wars Gamer*. He has published several books, including *The Law of Oz and Other Stories*, *The Magic Umbrella of Oz*, *Queen Ann in Oz*, and *Adolf Hitler in Oz*. Currently, he is hard at work on his own book, titled *Black Sabbath: The Illustrated Lyrics*, which presents an analysis of every song by the original Black Sabbath. In his spare time, he lives on Long Island with two humans, two dogs, and five cats.

Nathan P. Butler has been a contributor to the *Legends* continuity in the pages of *Star Wars Tales #21*, the backstory of the DC-0052 Intergalactic Speeder, and battle map dates for *The Essential Atlas*. He also had the distinct privilege of setting the in-universe calendar date (39:3:3) for *Return of the Jedi*, and contributed to the unofficial *Star Wars Super Collector's Wish Book, 4th Edition*. As a writer outside of *Star Wars*, he is the author of the "time travel and telepaths" novel *Greater Good*, and has contributed two novellas to the *WARS: The Battle of Phobos* series (based on the Decipher card game). Butler's most significant impact in *Star Wars* has been in the fandom community; he created and maintains *The Star Wars Timeline Gold* (the most comprehensive *Star Wars* chronology document available anywhere, at nearly 3,000 pages) and has been a *Star Wars* podcaster since 2002. (He can currently be heard on *Star Wars Beyond the Films* and *The Star Wars Report's Rebels Roundtable*, both at www.starwarsreport.com.) Butler was an early producer of *Star Wars* fan audio dramas online, including the first to hit the internet, 2002's *Second Strike*. By day, he is a professional educator, having taught for more than 12 years in a traditional classroom before becoming the first full-time social studies educator for his county's online school.

Scott Chernoff is a writer and actor in Los Angeles. He has written for *Conan* on TBS and *BoJack Horseman* on Netflix, and has appeared on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *The Sarah Silverman Program*, *Playing House*, *Tim & Eric's Tom Goes to the Mayor*, and more. Scott was a writer and managing editor for *Star Wars Insider* magazine from 1995 through 2002, and is the author of *The Stars of Star Wars* for LucasBooks / Random House. He can be reached on Twitter at @scottchernoff.

Kevin Colden has written and illustrated numerous comics and books, including the Xeric-winning and Eisner-nominated *Fishtown* and *I Rule the Night*, and has drawn *The Crow: Death and Rebirth* (with writer John Shirley). His hobbies include sleeping, eating, and growing interesting facial hair.

Dr. Julian Darius is the founder of Sequart Organization, which promotes comics and popular culture as legitimate forms of art. He wrote the first scholarly book on Christopher Nolan's *Batman* films and has authored several other books on comics, as well as more than a million words on Sequart.org. He also founded Martian Lit (martianlit.com), which publishes creative work, including his comic *Martian Comics*. He holds a Ph.D. in English and an M.A. in French. He's on Twitter at @juliandarius.

Ian Dawe is an independent scholar and freelance writer based in Vancouver, B.C. He has been a Sequart staff writer for two years and previously contributed to books about Alan Moore, 1970s horror comics, and *Star Trek*, in addition to writing for scholarly publications on James Bond and *Breaking Bad*. Ian holds both an M.A. in film and an M.Sc. in molecular biology, but can only make the Kessel run in seven parsecs.

Keith R.A. DeCandido's other essays have appeared in Sequart's *New Worlds and New Civilizations: Exploring Star Trek Comics*, as well as *Finding Serenity*, *King Kong is Back!*, *The Unauthorized X-Men*, *Webslinger*, *In the Hunt*, *Assembled!*, *Star Trek Magazine*, *Kobold Guide to Combat*, *Sci-Fi Bulletin*, *The Man from Krypton*, *You Did What?: Mad Plans and Historical Disasters*, and *Star Wars on Trial*. He also writes regularly about the *Star Trek*, *Stargate*, and *Doctor Who* franchises for Tor.com. On the fiction side of things, Keith has written more than 50 novels, as well as a metric buttload of short fiction, some of it in various media universes (most recently, *Star Trek: The Klingon Art of War*, *Sleepy Hollow: Children of the Revolution*, the *Tales of Asgard* trilogy, *Stargate*

SG-1: Kali's Wrath, and *Farscape: The War for the Uncharted Territories*) and others in worlds of his own creation (including a series of high-fantasy police procedurals that includes five novels and a dozen short stories). In 2009, he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Association of Media Tie-in Writers, which means he never needs to achieve anything ever again. In addition to writing, Keith is a freelance editor for clients both personal and corporate, a second-degree black belt in karate (which he teaches to both children and adults), a veteran podcaster, an avid baseball fan, and probably some other stuff that he can't remember due to a lack of sleep. Find out less at his cheerfully retro website, DeCandido.net.

Kevin Dilmore, a journalist for more than 25 years, has contributed to publications including the *Village Voice*, *Amazing Stories*, *Hallmark*, and *Star Trek Communicator* magazines, as well as websites including Hallmark.com and Star Trek.com. His essays on popular culture have been published in anthologies by Sequart and Crazy 8 Press. In 2014, a short film written by Kevin, *Outside of Town*, was selected for screening in the Short Film Corner of the Cannes International Film Festival. His short stories have appeared in anthologies including *Native Lands* by Crazy 8 Press. Kevin has teamed with author Dayton Ward for 15 years on novels, shorter fiction, and other writings chiefly within the *Star Trek* universe, including their latest novel in the *Star Trek: Seekers* series, *All That's Left*, published by Pocket Books in November 2015. By day, he works as a senior writer for Hallmark Cards in Kansas City, Mo., which published his Batman-themed puzzle book, *Riddle Me This*, in October. A graduate of the University of Kansas, Kevin lives in Overland Park, Kansas.

Rich Handley is the editor of Hasslein Books (www.hassleinbooks.com). In addition to co-editing Sequart's three *Star Wars* anthologies, he has contributed numerous works to Lucasfilm's *Star Wars* franchise, both fiction and non-fiction. Rich is the author or co-author of *Timeline of the Planet of the Apes*, *Lexicon of the Planet of the Apes*, *Conspiracy of the Planet of the Apes*, *Back in Time: The Back to the Future Chronology*, and *A Matter of Time: The Back to the Future Lexicon*. He has co-edited Sequart's *The Sacred Scrolls: Comics on the Planet of the Apes* and *Bright Eyes, Ape City: Examining the Planet of the Apes Mythos*, and his next big project will be to co-edit a *Planet of the Apes* fiction anthology

for Titan Books. Additionally, Rich has penned essays for IDWs *Star Trek* comic strip reprint books, ATB Publishing's *Outside In: TOS 110*, and Sequart's *New Life and New Civilizations: Exploring Star Trek Comics*, and has contributed to numerous magazines, including *Star Trek Communicator*, *Star Trek Magazine*, *Simian Scrolls*, *Cinefantastique*, *Movie Magic*, *Sci-Fi Invasion*, *Cinescape*, *Dungeon / Polyhedron*, and several *Star Wars* licensees.

Zaki Hasan was born and raised in Chicago—with a decade-long detour in Saudi Arabia—before settling in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is a professor of communication and media studies, and a co-founder of Mr. Boy Productions, an L.A.-based independent film and video company. A lifelong *Planet of the Apes* fan, Zaki self-published an *Apes* fanzine called *The Sacred Scrolls* in the mid-1990s, when he was still in high school. He currently co-hosts the MovieFilm Podcast and is a co-author of Quirk Books' *Geek Wisdom: The Sacred Teachings of Nerd Culture*. His work has been featured in *Q-News*, *Illume*, and *The Huffington Post*. In addition, he has appeared as a panelist on Al Jazeera America's *The Stream*, and is a contributing editor at Altmuslimah.com. Since 2004, his blog Zaki's Corner (www.zakiscorner.com) has been his one-stop forum for musings on news, media, politics, and pop culture.

Rocko Jerome's parents named him, but they had no idea who he would be. His friends nicknamed him because they know exactly who he is. He's glad Harrison Ford didn't get his way and see Han Solo killed off in *Return of the Jedi*, because the trauma of that probably would've made him into a sports fan or something. He's seen the *Star Wars* movies enough times that they are thoroughly bonded to his DNA. He's self-employed as a writer, but doesn't always get along with his boss.

Miss Lasko-Gross is the author and illustrator of Z2 Comics' YALSA-nominated *Henni*, Fantagraphics Books' *A Mess of Everything* (which was named one of *Booklist*'s top-ten graphic novels of the year), and the YALSA-nominated *Escape From "Special."* Her artwork is currently featured in the traveling exhibit *Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women.*

Alex Newborn's formative childhood experiences were his first visit to Walt Disney World in 1976 and seeing *Star Wars* in 1977. He previously wrote about the original *Star Tours* for *Star Wars Insider* magazine, and is a

frequent contributor to EndorExpress.net. His other interests include the Muppets, *Ghostbusters*, acting, directing, and performing improv comedy. Alex is married and a father of two sons, who share his love of Disney Parks and *Ghostbusters* cosplay.

David Pipgras, as a freelance writer and graphic designer, has created many works for both Lucasfilm and Paramount, among others. He was a writer for Topps' *Star Wars Galaxy Collector* magazine, and previously co-edited a fanzine called *Star Wars Collector*. A hopeless romantic with a sarcastic sense of humor, he is honest, complicated, and usually somewhat likable. He lives with his wife Dari and daughter Maya in Vancouver, WA (the other Vancouver), and still does not know what he wants to be when he grows up.

Matthew Sunrich went to see *Star Wars* during its original theatrical run just before his third birthday. Not surprisingly, he fell asleep. Soon, however, Lucasfilm (along with Saturday-morning reruns of *The Marvel Super Heroes* cartoons from Grantray-Lawrence Animation) engendered in him a love of fantasy. He became obsessed with comics in the late 1980s after many years of collecting action figures and trading cards. Today, he continues to amass comics (particularly Bronze Age) and enjoys *Dungeons & Dragons* and its myriad derivatives, sword-and-sorcery fiction, and classic video games. He regularly writes for Hasslein Books' blog (hassleinbooks.blogspot.com) and is currently working on a book for Hasslein exploring the adventures of Red Sonja.

Lou Tambone (www.loutambone.com, www.facebook.com/loutunes) is an independent musician, freelance writer, and Web designer from northern New Jersey. A lifelong fan of pop culture, he was an early HTML adopter, creating and maintaining some of the first *Star Wars* fan sites located under the www.starwarz.com banner. Lou has been published in *Sci-Fi World* magazine and the Sequart anthology *The Sacred Scrolls: Comics on the Planet of the Apes*, and also contributed to another Sequart *Star Wars* anthology, *A More Civilized Age: Exploring the Star Wars Expanded Universe*. When he's not reading or writing stories, Lou is usually writing or rehearsing music with one of his many bands. During his "spare" time, he tries to remember to eat and breathe.

Dayton Ward is the *New York Times* bestselling author or co-author of numerous novels and short stories, including a whole bunch of stuff set in

the *Star Trek* universe, and often works with friend and co-writer Kevin Dilmore. He has also written (or co-written) articles for *Star Trek Communicator, Star Trek Magazine*, *Syfy.com*, StarTrek.com, and *Tor.com*, and is a monthly contributor to the Novel Spaces writers blog (novelspaces.blogspot.com). Dayton is known to wax nostalgic about all manner of geek and sundry topics over on his own blog, *The Fog of Ward* (www.daytonward.com).

Steven H. Wilson is an award-winning podcaster, a blogger, and a novelist, as well as a former writer for DC Comics. His appreciation for *Star Wars* is heavily centered on the original film. Steve was 12 years old when *Star Wars* came to theaters, and 12 is, after all, the Golden Age of Science Fiction. His modest collection of memorabilia includes the briefcase that author Alan Dean Foster carried when he was ghost-writing the novelization of what later came to be known as *Episode IV*. Foster had proudly emblazoned it with a sticker of Ralph McQuarrie's first piece of publicity art for *The Star Wars.* Steve would like to thank his son, Christian, for research assistance for this article, as well as for airing the *Star Wars Holiday Special* repeatedly in the family room, leading to a sense of in-depth knowledge of the subject. Follow Steve online at www.stevenhwilson.com.

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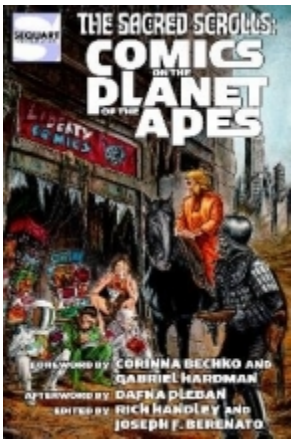
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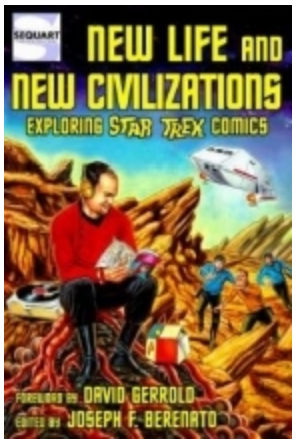

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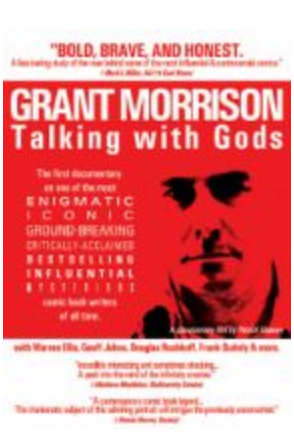

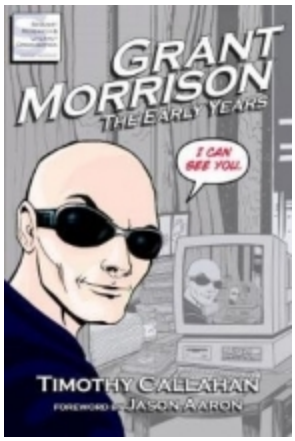

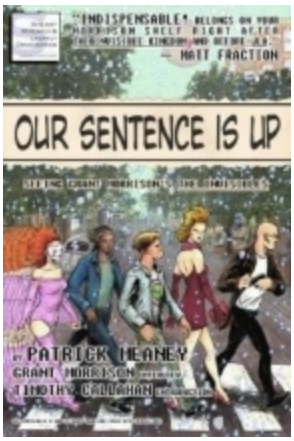
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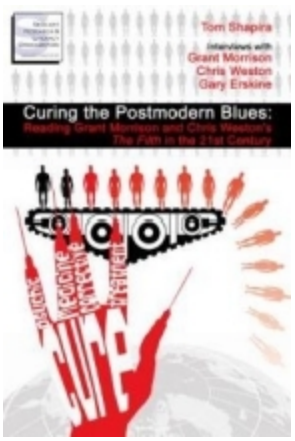

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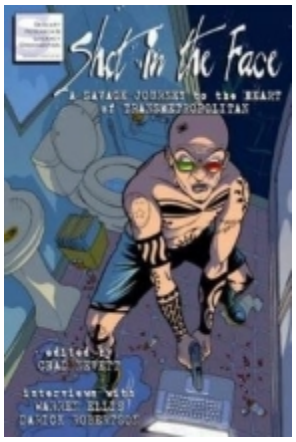

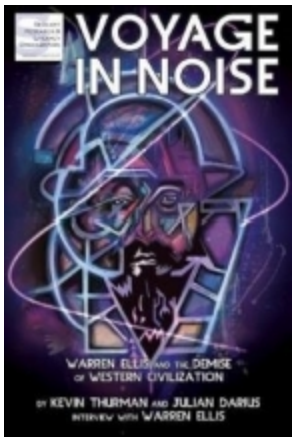
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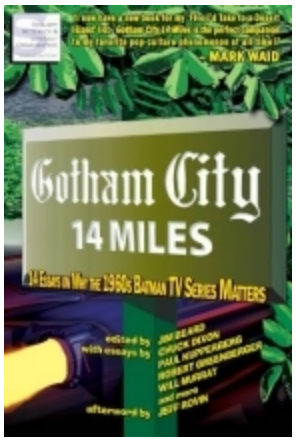

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[1] Which is kind of funny, since the calendar would have been a year out of date at that point.

[2] Brendon wrote a number of brilliant *Star Wars* fan-fiction tales. Check them out: www.theforce.net/fanfiction/brendan/index.html. You'll be glad you did.

[3] If you're asking, right now, "Huh? *The Wizard of Oz*?", then check out my essay on that very topic.

[4] With at least five more to follow, one a year until 2020: *Episodes VIII* and *IX*, as well as standalone films focused on Rogue Squadron, Han Solo, and (reportedly) Boba Fett. Plus, there are rumors of Ewan McGregor returning as Obi-Wan Kenobi. It's an exciting time, indeed, to be a *Star Wars* aficionado, folks.

[5] From *ThunderCats*.

[6] From *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*.

[7] From *Voltron: Defender of the Universe* (the Lion Force version, of course).

[8] Do kids even understand this reference? A long time ago, we had these things called VCRs…

[9] You can find my thoughts about the film, both then and now, later in this book.

[10] Both of which frequently make top-ten lists for the most dangerous city in the United States, with Camden often taking the top spot

[11] I feel the same way, actually, about *The Godfather Part III*, which – as anyone will tell you – is by far the weakest of the three motion pictures. However, it was the first entry of the saga that I saw – in the theater, no less – and, like *Jedi*, was the one that really started my love for the trilogy, and so it remains my favorite, both in spite of and because of its flaws.

[12] Because, despite what Master Yoda says, I believe there *is* such a thing as "try." He should know better; only a Sith deals in absolutes.

[13] If you're interested, you can read more about him at jfberenato.wordpress.com/2015/07/14/il-camposanto-largu/.

[14] Issues 30 (summer 1996) through 60 (June 2002)

[15] Clarke recalls this in his introduction to the paperback edition of his novel *2010: Odyssey Two*.

[16] Albert and David Maysles, whose documentary films include *What's Happening! The Beatles in the USA* (1964), *Salesman* (1968), *Gimme Shelter* (1970), and *Grey Gardens* (1976)

[17] "Artifact From the Future: The Making of *THX 1138*," DVD, 2004.

[18] It should be noted that many of these comments apply only to North American and British science-fiction cinema in the 1970s. Elsewhere, there was ample serious sci-fi that remains fascinating to this day, following in the tradition of Jean-Luc Goddard's *Alphaville* (1965). These include Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *World on a Wire* (1973). *THX*, with its repeated phrases, human-machine interfaces, and lack of exposition, in fact borrows from *Alphaville*, demonstrating Lucas's knowledge of contemporary art cinema.

[19] An interesting *Star Wars* connection: Dark Horse Comics' first *Droids* miniseries paid homage to the three robots by pairing R2-D2 and C-3PO with a trio of nanny droids called U-E, Q-E, and 2-E.

[20] *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*. Dir. Charles De Lauzirika. Warner Home Video, 2007. DVD.

[21] Bay Area Rapid Transit, San Francisco's regional rail service

[22] It is no coincidence that one of the only sequences in the much-maligned *Star Wars* prequel *The Phantom Menace* that is usually hailed as an effective part of the film is the pod race, an even more direct reference to Lucas's love of racing cars.

[23] The Death Star itself is just as much an electronic labyrinth as the one from which THX escapes in the earlier film.

[24] "Artifact From the Future: The Making of *THX 1138*," DVD, 2004.

[25] "Episode One: The Beginning," behind-the-scenes featurette, DVD.

[26] In fact, this would not be the last use of little people in the *Star Wars* films, given the later appearances of Ugnaughts, Ewoks, Even Piell, Yaddle, Weazel, and, of course, Yoda. Shortness and *Star Wars* tend to go hand in hand, and that's without even mentioning Luke's stature among stormtroopers.

[27] An element absent in the book, incidentally, in which there are far fewer of them, they wear mainly blue, and they neither sing nor dance.

[28] This element of Han Solo's character is played up more in Mel Brooks' 1987 *Star Wars* spoof *Spaceballs*, in which Han analogue Lone Starr is ultimately revealed to be a prince, enabling him to marry Leia stand-in Princess Vespa.

[29] In Baum's novel, the Witch's footwear is silver, not ruby. They're also shoes, not slippers. The change was made in the film adaptation to take advantage of the bright Technicolor hues, which made red far more visually stimulating than silver. And despite the name, the film footwear is also shoes, as evidenced by the heels (which aren't usually found on slippers).

[30] As seen in *Oz the Great and Powerful*, Disney's 2013 sequel to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

[31] This is another case of the parallels crossing characters, as C-3PO finds himself disassembled by stormtroopers (the monkeys' analogue) in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Both the Scarecrow and the droid are successfully reconstructed.

[32] Marvel Comics rectified this oversight by explaining that Leia gave Chewie his medal at a party after the ceremony since he was too tall for her to reach his neck while on stage.

[33] By title only. Although Palpatine's name appears in the first film's novelization and in many spinoff novels, he is never referred to by name on-screen until *The Phantom Menace*.

[34] In yet another example of transposed character traits, the holographic version of the Wizard provides Dorothy and her friends with a new mission, just as Leia's holographic message initially sends Luke on his journey.

[35] In the novels, Dorothy neither has nor needs a character arc. Like R2-D2, she bears simple wisdom, guilelessness, and clarity of thought, unfettered by anything but the desire to help others and live a happy life.

[36] "Hollywood's 100 Favorite Films." *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 25, 2014: www.hollywoodreporter.com/person/extra-terrestrial.

[37] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Side_of_the_Rainbow

[38] Baxter, John. *Mythmaker: The Life and Work of George Lucas*. Avon Books, 1999.

[39] The curator of The Royal Timeline of Oz (oztimeline.net) and creator of The Royal Publisher of Oz (theroyalpublisherofoz.com)

[40] Harris, Mark. *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Films and the Birth of the New Hollywood*. Penguin Press, 2008.

[41] www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/george-lucas-star-wars-288513

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Byron, Ellen; Paul Ziobro. "Elsa Dominates Anna in 'Frozen' Merchandise Sales." *The Wall Street Journal*, 4 November 2014.

[45] www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/magazine/how-disney-turned-frozen-into-a-cash-cow.html

[46] fortune.com/2015/02/03/disney-quarterly-earnings/

[47] variety.com/2014/biz/news/disney-brands-generate-record-40-9-billion-from-licensed-merchandise-in-2013-1201221813/

[48] www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/superhero-earns-13-billion-a-748281

[49] www.vox.com/2014/8/11/5974743/marvels-x-men-conspiracy-theory-guardians-future

[50] Lucas himself has said that he wanted his daughter to have a stuffed Ewok.

[51] My brother's favorite figure was Chewbacca, and whenever our dog got mad, he'd go into my brother's room, root through stacked yellow plastic bins my parents had bought for us, find the Chewbacca figure, and chew it up. The dog would leave all of the other figures alone; he knew Chewbacca was Brendan's favorite. Brendan would cry and cry, and my parents replaced so many Chewbacca figures that they actually started keeping extras on hand. That's right: we loved *Star Wars* so much that even the *dog* knew this was the best way to inflict emotional injury.

[52] I still recall filing with cinema luminaries along the theater's elevated wooden walkway, with tall trees nearby, which probably reminded me of the Ewoks' Forest Moon of Endor.

[53] *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy*. *Star Wars* Trilogy box set DVD documentary.

[54] Read, Piers Paul. *Alec Guinness: The Authorised Biography*. Simon & Schuster, 2005.

[55] The death of Obi-Wan Kenobi necessitated a replacement mentor for *The Empire Strikes Back*, which is the only reason Yoda was created.

[56] Guinness, Alec. *A Positively Final Appearance*. Penguin Books, 2001.

[57] *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy*. *Star Wars* Trilogy box set DVD documentary.

[58] www.rogerebert.com/reviews/star-wars-1977

[59] Neither, for that matter, does Luke ever shed a tear or show any kind of grief following the deaths of his aunt and uncle – but he sure does grieve Ben Kenobi, whom he just met.

[60] See the essay "Luke, Dorothy, and the Hero's Journey: We're Not on Tatooine Anymore, (Ar)To-(Dee)To," elsewhere in this volume.

[61] And not just because "Luke S." sounds like "Lucas"

[62] Notably, the many dead on Alderaan and the two Death Stars don't get to come back as ghosts. But, then, the movies have always depicted the Jedi as an elitist order, superior to commoners. Whether they get an afterlife at all in the *Star Wars* universe isn't clear.

[63] An American announcer, narrator, and voiceover actor for more than 60 years, best known to modern audiences as the voice of the Robot B-9 on *Lost in Space*.

[64] Although Lucasfilm's official spelling of the species' name is "Wookiee," a one-e spelling appeared on several early materials, including George Lucas's *Holiday Special* outline.

[65] DiGiacomo, Frank. "The Han Solo Comedy Hour!" *VanityFair.com*. 22 Dec., 2008.

[66] "Bruce Vilanch: They Call Him Bruce": www.combustiblecelluloid.com/intbv.shtml

[67] Kirkwood, SKot. "Interview with Patty Maloney, 'Lumpy': starwarsholidayspecial.com/text/patty_maloney.htm

[68] Though he *did* allow the publication of a spinoff book, *The Wookiee Storybook*, written by Eleanor Ehrhardt and illustrated by Patricia Wynne, as well as a sequel story in the L.A. Times Syndicate newspaper strip, written by Russ Manning.

[69] The outline contained the single-e spelling.

[70] Gardner, Will. "The Bea Arthur Interview." *The Portland Mercury.* 19 Oct., 2005.

[71] DiGiacomo, VanityFair.com

[72] Kirkwood, starwarsholidayspecial.com

[73] starwarsholidayspecial.com/text/story_treatment.htm

[74] DiGiacomo, VanityFair.com

[75] *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* (Da Capo Press; Updated edition, 1999), p. 173.

[76] P., Ken. "An Interview With Gary Kurtz." IGN. 11 Nov., 2002: www.ign.com/articles/2002/11/11/an-interview-with-gary-kurtz.

[77] Boucher, Geoff. *Los Angeles Times*. 12 Aug. 12, 2010: articles.latimes.com/2010/aug/12/entertainment/la-et-gary-kurtz-20100812.

[78] The opening crawl was also used in another serial, 1940's *The Green Hornet*.

[79] See Julian Darius's essay about how *Star Wars* broke cinema, elsewhere in this book.

[80] www.gq-magazine.co.uk/entertainment/articles/2011-03/15/gq-film-godfather-part-four and *The Godfather Part II* DVD commentary (2005).

[81] For a more comprehensive analysis of the origins of the "Father Vader" concept, and more information about the development of *Star Wars*, see Michael Kaminski's exhaustive tome, *The Secret History of Star Wars* (Legacy Books, 2008).

[82] Bouzereau, Laurent. (Ballantine Books, 1997).

[83] Scanlon, Paul. *Rolling Stone*: www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/the-wizard-of-star-wars-20120504.

[84] I'm sure there's someone out there who feels that way… but I've never met him.

[85] Lambie, Ryan. "George Lucas, *Star Wars* & the changing state of its sequels." Den of Geek, 1 May, 2014: www.denofgeek.us/movies/star-wars/235219/george-lucas-star-wars-the-changing-state-of-its-sequels.

[86] www.empireonline.com/301/

[87] Scanlon, Paul. "The Force Behind *Star Wars*." *Rolling Stone*, August 1977.

[88] Lucas transferred the idea of letting others into his universe through the spinoff books and comics that came to be called the Expanded Universe. He set out the parameters and finer points of his galaxy for Carol Titleman and her team in Lucasfilm's nascent publishing division; Titleman oversaw the development of the earliest *Star Wars* novels and comics.

[89] Taylor, Chris. "*Star Wars*' Producer Blasts *Star Wars* Myths." Mashable, 27 Sept., 2014: mashable.com/2014/09/27/star-wars-myths-gary-kurtz/.

[90] Boucher, Geoff. "Did *Star Wars* become a toy story? Producer Gary Kurtz looks back." Hero Complex, 12 Aug., 2010: herocomplex.latimes.com/movies/star-wars-was-born-a-long-time-ago-but-not-all-that-far-far-away-in-1972-filmmakers-george-lucas-and-gary-kurtz-wer/.

[91] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[92] Pollock, Dale. *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, Updated Edition. DeCapo Press, 1999.

[93] Ibid.

[94] P., Ken. "An Interview With Gary Kurtz." IGN Film Force, 11 Nov., 2002: www.ign.com/articles/2002/11/11/an-interview-with-gary-kurtz.

[95] Taylor, Chris. "*Star Wars*' Producer Blasts *Star Wars* Myths." Mashable, 27 Sept., 2014: http://mashable.com/2014/09/27/star-wars-myths-gary-kurtz/.

[96] A better solution would have been to keep Kurtz onboard and bring Kazanjian in as an additional producer to ensure the production stayed within budget.

[97] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[98] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[99] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] The Expanded Universe explained that by the time of *Return of the Jedi*, Logray, the head shaman, had turned toward dark rituals, and that it was he who was responsible for wanting to sacrifice Han, Luke, and Chewbacca.

[106] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Pollock, Dale. *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas*, Updated Edition. DeCapo Press, 1999.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Biskind, Peter. *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*. Simon & Schuster, 1998.

[111] Kaminsky, Michae. *The Secret History of Star Wars*. Legacy Books Press, 2008.

[112] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[113] Biskind, Peter. *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*. Simon & Schuster, 1998.

[114] Baxter, John. *Mythmaker: The Life and Work of George Lucas*. William Morrow, 1999. (Also titled *George Lucas: A Biography;* HarperCollins, 1999.)

[115] Worrell, Denise. *Time Magazine* interview. 23 May, 1983.

[116] An idea explored quite similarly in the best-selling six-issue *Dark Empire* comic-book series from Tom Veitch (Dark Horse Comics, 1991)

[117] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[118] Kline, Sally. *George Lucas: Interviews*. University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

[119] Thankfully, in the Expanded Universe, these characters are shown to have escaped the sail barge's destruction.

[120] Fett later escapes the sarlacc in the Expanded Universe.

[121] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[122] Lucas made the same mistake with the *Special Edition* of *The Empire Strikes Back*, in which he damaged the scene of Luke sacrificing himself at Cloud City by making the young Jedi scream in panic while falling. Previously, Luke had bravely accepted death as an alternative to joining the dark side. Now, he was a terrified banshee.

[123] As Lucas first envisioned all of Yoda's apprentices awaiting him in the Netherworld of the Force, it wouldn't be out of place to show all of the fallen Jedi in the background.

[124] Rinzler, Jonathan. *The Making of Return of the Jedi*. Del Rey, 2013.

[125] Biskind, Peter. *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls*. Simon & Schuster, 1998.

[126] Moskowitz, Clara. "Super-Earth Planet Likely Made of Diamond." Space.com (12 Oct., 2012): www.space.com/18011-super-earth-planet-diamond-world.html.

[127] Though Luke calls the droid an R2 unit, Kenner named it R5-D4 when creating an action figure of the astromech, and that name was later accepted by Expanded Universe writers.

[128] The barkeep has since been given the names Wuher and Cedo Partu in the Expanded Universe.

[129] Biggs Darklighter and Janek "Tank" Sunber; cut scenes from *A New Hope* reveal other friends named Fixer, Camie, Deak, and Windy.

[130] Such a tactic, of course, would be entirely ineffective if someone were to view the traveling Sand People from either side.

[131] Known as Malakili in the Expanded Universe

[132] Even if the *Special Edition* did turn it into Audrey II from *Little Shop of Horrors*

[133] "Walrus Man," so dubbed by Kenner, has since been named Ponda Baba and Sawkee in the Expanded Universe, while his facially scarred cohort has alternatively been called Cornelius Evazan and Roofoo.

[134] So, naturally, he was sent to live with Vader's stepbrother in the very house in which the Sith Lord's mother once dwelled, and also retained Anakin's surname.

[135] Though it is mentioned, especially at the film's end.

[136] *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (BBC Radio 4, 1978)

[137] Most likely named in honor of Warwick Davis, the actor who played Wicket. Interestingly, Davis was only 11 years old when he first put on the Ewok costume.

[138] Named after actor Tom Selleck, whom ABC Entertainment had originally suggested for the role of Noa, and directors Jim and Ken Wheat

[139] The Nightsisters were further explored in *The Clone Wars*, though Charal was never mentioned in that animated series.

[140] Church, Jok, and Garrett, Maureen. "*Ewoks* & *Droids* TV Series: Executive Producer Miki Herman Talks about TV and 'Raising the Standards.'" *Bantha Tracks* #29 (Summer 1985).

[141] Shefchik, Rick. "Cartoons are Serious Business." *The Day*, New London, CT. (9/3/85): Arts & Living, p. C4.

[142] Miller, Bob. "Saturday Morning *Star Wars*." *Starlog Yearbook*. No. 3, (July 1988).

[143] As noted on the back covers

[144] Massara, Jim. "The Origin of Star Comics." *Marvel Age* #19, (October [July] 1984): pp. 22-23.

[145] www.imdb.com/event/ev0000223/1985

[146] Although unknown at the time, this would place the *Droids* stories four years after the end of the Clone Wars and the formation of the Empire, as depicted in *Revenge of the Sith*.

[147] Church, Jok, and Garrett, Maureen. "*Ewoks* & *Droids* TV Series: Executive Producer Miki Herman Talks about TV and 'Raising the Standards.'" *Bantha Tracks* #29 (Summer 1985).

[148] Later labelled as "The *Trigon One*," "Mon Julpa," and "The Adventures of Mungo Baobab."

[149] Miller, Bob. "Saturday Morning *'Star Wars*.'" *Starlog Yearbook*. No. 3, (July 1988): p. 77.

[150] Shepard, Richard F. "The Stage: Ice Show at Garden." *The New York Times*, New York, NY. (2/2/86): www.nytimes.com/1986/02/02/arts/the-stage-ice-show-at-garden.html.

[151] Saavedra, Scott. "It's a Hero Science Sandwich!" *Amazing Heroes*. No. 143, (15 June 1988): p. 21.

[152] Miller, Bob. "TV Episode Guide: *Ewoks* & *Droids*." *Starlog Yearbook*. No. 3, (July 1988): p. 80.

[153] The same day as the premiere of Nelvana's more successful animated series *The Care Bears Family*, which ran for three seasons, also on ABC. Nelvana had previously produced two *Care Bears* movies in 1984 and 1986.

[154] Miller, Bob. "Saturday Morning '*Star Wars*.'" *Starlog Yearbook.* No. 3 (July 1988): p. 87.

[155] Garrett, Maureen. "*Ewoks* & *Droids*: Read All About 'Em." *Bantha Tracks*. No. 31, (Winter 1986).

[156] *Hot Stuff 1986: Kenner Catalog*: p. 27.

[157] A period in which no new *Star Wars* products were released, ironically during the time of the first movie's 10th anniversary. It would last for six months until fall 1987, when *The Lucasfilm Fan Club Official Magazine* #1, *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, and *Star Wars 3-D* #1 (*Blackthorne 3-D Series* #30) would be published.

[158] *Droids: The White Witch* and *Ewoks and the Dandelion Warriors*

[159] Both the books and the *MyComyc* strips were recently re-discovered, scanned, translated, and posted online on StarWars.com.

[160] Vilmur, Pete. "Droids et Ewoks de Marchandises." StarWars.com (12 November 2008; now obsolete).

[161] *The Ewok Fun Colouring Book* and *The Droid Colouring Book of the Future*.

[162] Dark Horse also produced a one-page *Droids* comic strip printed on the back of Kellogg's Apple Jacks cereal boxes, written by Windham and illustrated by Hughes. Unlike other *Droids*-related tales, the strip shows R2-D2 and C-3PO on a mission with Luke Skywalker.

[163] Burtt subsequently wrote an in-universe book set two years after the Battle of Endor as his character, titled *Star Wars: Galactic Phrase Book & Travel Guide*, and published by Del Rey in August 2001.

[164] Bray, Adam. *Star Wars Rebels: The Visual Guide* (21 July 2014): p. 83.

[165] Carey, Craig R.; Fry, Jason; and Wallace, Daniel. "Endor and the Moddell Sector." *Star Wars Gamer*. No. 9 (April/May 2002): p. 30.

[166] Part 1: www.starwars.com/news/the-droids-re-animated-part-1. Part 2: www.starwars.com/news/the-droids-re-animated-part-2.

[167] www.endorexpress.net/startours/celebrating/interplanetary-launch-premiere-party/

[168] www.endorexpress.net/startours/creating/creating-fantasies/

[169] Newborn, Alex. "*Star Tours:* Taking Off on a Star Tour." *Star Wars Insider* #104 (2008).

[170] www.endorexpress.net/startours/celebrating/opening-day-press-conference/

[171] Champlin, Charles. *George Lucas: The Creative Impulse*. Harry N. Abrams, 1992: p. 94.

[172] www.endorexpress.net/startours/celebrating/opening-day-press-conference/

[173] Gordon, Bruce; Mumford, David; and Tietz, Chris. "*Star Wars*: The Disneyland Journey." *Starlog* #118. May 1987.

[174] www.endorexpress.net/startours/creating/interview-tom-fitzgerald/ – Fitzerald's quotes throughout the essay come from this interview.

[175] Newborn, Alex. "*Star Tours:* Taking Off on a Star Tour." *Star Wars Insider* #104 (2008).

[176] www.endorexpress.net/startours/creating/creating-fantasies/

[177] disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2010/09/these-are-the-droids-you're-looking-for/

[178] A blueprint comparison can be found at the *Adventure Thru Inner Space* fansite, www.themightymicroscope.com.

[179] Newborn, Alex. "*Star Tours:* Taking Off on a Star Tour." *Star Wars Insider* #104 (2008).

[180] The helmet worn by X-wing pilot Jek Porkins (William Hootkins) in *A New Hope*

[181] Representations of Mickey Mouse that are subtly inserted into films, television programs, or amusement park rides

[182] All four simulators in Anaheim were replaced in 1994 because the military training use for which they were designed had never been intended to operate for 15 hours a day, every day of the week. As reported in the 4 March 1994, issue of the *Disneyland Line* cast magazine (Vol. 26, No. 9), the rehabilitation was lengthy and nvolved a 165-ton crane with a 200-foot boom arm. The defunct cabins were removed through a very large hole in the building's roof, lifted over the Disneyland Railroad Bridge, and lowered to the Alice parking lot.

[183] www.anthonydaniels.com/qa/index.html

[184] This may be one of those things that only I find funny, but in the front queue, reference is made to Flight 11-19, local service to Endor. In the boarding video, we see several Ewoks and two Mon Calamari, so they're arguably on Flight 11-19 together. When I first began working at Red Lobster in 1992, the four-digit product look-up code (PLU) 1119 stood for... wait for it... fried calamari.

[185] Teek comes from 1985's *Ewoks: Battle for Endor*, but I visually identified Kaink from 1984's *The Ewok Adventure: Caravan of Courage* while transcribing the opening-day ceremony.

[186] www.endorexpress.net/startours/creating/interview-mark-eades/

[187] www.endorexpress.net/startours/creating/interview-with-lynette-eklund-ackbar-puppeteer/

[188] www.anthonydaniels.com/qa/

[189] Newborn, Alex. "*Star Tours:* Taking Off on a Star Tour." *Star Wars Insider* #104 (2008).

[190] Newborn, Alex. "*Star Tours:* Taking Off on a Star Tour." *Star Wars Insider* #104 (2008).

[191] www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9xW1nCnsvk

[192] The alphabet used to denote Galactic Standard, the common language spoken in the *Star Wars* universe

[193] disneyparks.disney.go.com/blog/2010/10/whos-flying-this-thing/

[194] www.ew.com/article/2011/05/19/star-tours-disney-star-wars-video

[195] A fact that haunts me still; to this day, whenever the topic of the film comes up, one of my friends will invariably look at me, wide-eyed, and say, "Wow!"

[196] Berenato, Joseph F. "*Star Wars*: The Legacy Continues." *The Hammonton Gazette*. 26 May 1999, Volume 3, Issue 21 ed., Entertainment sec.: 17+. Print.

[197] This particular ladyfriend drove two hours to spend the day with me and see *The Phantom Menace*. Whether by coincidence or as a direct result of that viewing, I can't say, but I have not seen her since.

[198] Though not literally, thankfully. To the best of my knowledge, Palpatine stays clothed throughout the entire saga.

[199] Considering Obi-Wan Kenobi's gift for prevarication, it's a wonder he never turned to the dark side.

[200] Ross, Marion. "May the Force Be With Ewan McGregor." *Film Review*. No. 567, Mar 1998: 32-37.

[201] www.yahoo.com/headlines/971015/entertainment/stories/ film_heat_1.html

[202] Though *The Phantom Menace* represented the first time that the character had his name spoken onscreen, he was referred to as Palpatine as far back as *Star Wars: From the Adventures of*

Luke Skywalker, by Alan Dean Foster, in December 1976, six whole months before *Star Wars* was even released.

[203] Basic biology tells us that when creatures die, sphincters relax; they void their bladder and their bowels, releasing waste solids, liquids, and gasses. Yet, for all of the people and animals that died in the original trilogy – including a tauntaun, and we're told flat-out that the thing smells bad – nothing ever caused the filmmakers to explore that avenue of post-mortem realism.

[204] This somehow became a fact that *everyone* in the 1980s knew, though none of us were completely sure how. Further investigation indicates that it was mentioned in Alan Dean Foster's *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*, a 1979 issue of *Dynamite* magazine, and a 1977 *Rolling Stone* interview with George Lucas. How I knew any of that when I was five, however, is completely beyond me.

[205] www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/dash-cam-footage-shows-jake-lloyd-chase-article-1.2267949

[206] Archival Interview Commentary Track, *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. Blu-ray, 2011.

[207] Though George Lucas would undoubtedly disagree. Before selling Lucasfilm to Disney, Lucas had a penchant for tinkering with the quality of the films, even going so far as replacing the puppet Yoda who originally appeared in the prequel trilogy with a CGI one, for reasons known only to him.

[208] www.npr.org/2014/03/20/291977042/theres-more-than-one-way-to-watch-star-wars

[209] news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1375742.stm

[210] Ibid.

[211] Douthat, Ross. "Did *Star Wars* Need Ben Affleck?" *The New York Times*. Jan. 29, 2013: douthat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/29/did-star-wars-need-ben-affleck/.

[212] "From World War to *Star Wars*: Rise of an Empire." Starwars.com, July 15, 2014: www.starwars.com/news/from-world-war-to-star-wars-rise-of-an-empire.

[213] For an examination of how Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory applies to *Star Wars*, see the essay "Luke, Dorothy, and the Hero's Journey: We're Not on Tatooine Anymore, (Ar)To-(Dee)To," elsewhere in this book.

[214] Something which both individuals become aware of (and angry about) in *The Clone Wars* animated series

[215] Chernoff, Scott. "Stamp of Approval." *Star Wars Insider* #41, December 1998.

[216] Though Luke is arguably the one who ultimately fulfills the prophecy in *Return of the Jedi*, when he gives Vader the strength to kill the Emperor.

[217] And even in this very book.

[218] The method of his death was particularly surprising, considering how he famously told George Lucas, "I don't mind dying. I just don't wan to go out like some punk."

[219] David Brin, "What's wrong (and right) with *The Phantom Menace*," Salon.com, June 1999.

[220] Windolf, Jim. "*Star Wars*: The Last Battle." *Vanity Fair*: www.vanityfair.com/news/2005/02/star-wars-george-lucas-story.

[221] Then again, *Attack of the Clones* featured a character named Sleazebaggano…

[222] To be fair, the use of Kaiburr crystals in lightsabers originated in Kevin J. Anderson's *Young Jedi Knights* books.

[223] See the essay on *Star Wars: Rebels*, elsewhere in this volume.

[224] In fact, Yoda's inner specter is drawn and voiced to strongly resemble this *Lord of the Rings* character, so the comparison is intentional.

[225] There *was* more, just not on screen. *The Clone Wars Legacy* also included a comic book miniseries titled *Darth Maul—Son of Dathomir*, by Jeremy Barlow, and the novel *Dark Disciple*, by Christine Golden, each based on additional episodes that would have been produced had the series not been cancelled. Moreover, a slew of *Clone Wars* comics, novels, and young-adult books were released as part of the Expanded Universe, which have fallen out of the current Disney-era canon.

[226] The majority of its second season is expected to air in fall 2015, just prior to the theatrical release of *Star Wars The Force Awakens* and the publication of this anthology. However, that season's first episodes already premiered on 19 April 2015, at *Star Wars* Celebration Anaheim, and on June 20, 2015, on Disney XD.

[227] Short for "retroactive continuity"; to retcon means to change something in the past to fit current story canon.

[228] *Cinescape* interview with George Lucas, July 2001: "There are two worlds here. There's my world, which is the movies, and there's this other world that has been created, which I say is the parallel universe — the licensing world of the books, games, and comic books. They don't intrude on my world, which is a select period of time, [but] they do intrude in between the movies. I don't get too involved in the parallel universe."

[229] The ceremonial weapon of a Lasan Honor Guard

[230] In keeping with the vampire motif, these words actually echo a similar quote spoken by Bela Lugosi as the titular *Dracula* in the 1931 film: "There are far worse things awaiting man than death."

[231] The episode shares its title with another Lando adventure set before *The Empire Strikes Back*: "Lando Calrissian: Idiot's Array," a 2008 short story by Rich Handley.

[232] Handy, Bruce. "The Daring Genesis of J.J. Abrams's *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*." *Vanity Fair*, June 2015: www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/05/star-wars-the-force-awakens-vanity-fair-cover.